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OR, THE UNSEEN ENEMY.

The Romance of a Blind Cruise.

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AUTHOR OF "WRESTLING JACOB," "GAMIN BOB," "JEFF FLICKER," "JACK-O'-LANTERN," "TARTAR TIM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
PASSENGERS WHO MAY CAUSE TROUBLE.
A CRY for help arose in the fast-advancing darkness of twilight.
"Some one in danger! Where is it?"
"It seems to be on the water."
"Sure! That's where it is; but *where*, and who calls? Listen, Ned!"
"There it is, again, Sol!"

THE FLAME FLARED UP BRIGHTLY, AND SOL REALIZED WITH UNEASINESS THAT IT WAS LIKE A SIGNAL-LIGHT.

And, sure enough, the cry once more fell upon their ears.

"Help! help! We are drowning!"

The scene was on that queen river of New York, the noble Hudson. Two boys stood upon a raft which was floating down with the current, and they peered into the darkness with eager anxiety.

"There they be!" cried he who had been called Sol. "See! That's a boat, bottom up, an' some folks clingin' to it. I reckon they can't swim. We must save them."

"But we haven't any boat!"

"Never mind; we kin fix that."

The speaker caught up a long rope which lay in coil.

"Make one end o' this fast!" he ordered; and then he seized the other end and sprung into the water.

Ned caught his idea, and hastened to make the connection sure.

"Saltpeter Sol is the boy to save them!" he murmured.

The object of this high praise was swimming rapidly toward the overturned boat. He was almost as much at home in the water as a fish, and the first part of the task he had undertaken was as nothing to him.

He soon reached the boat. The cries had continued, and seemed to indicate a great degree of alarm; and Sol's liveliest sympathy became aroused when he saw that one of the pair—there were but two—was a woman.

"Brace up!" he sung out, cheerily. "We'll hev you out o' this in a jiffy, an' you'll rather enjoy it when the racket is all over!"

"We shall perish!" wailed the man.

"Not a bit on't."

"But we can't hold on much longer."

"You don't need ter."

"We're getting terribly weak, ain't we, Eliza?"

"Yes, we are, Jimmy," the woman agreed.

"You kin rest all you want ter, directly. See! we'll tow you in!"

Saltpeter Sol deftly fitted a noose of the rope around the end of the boat, and then raised his voice and shouted:

"Pull, Ned! Pull strong an' steady!"

"Ay, ay!" came back the answer.

"You're all right," continued the life-saver.

"Hold yer courage fur the fraction of a second."

So saying he put his shoulder against the boat, and, swimming strongly, began to push the craft toward the raft. Ned had settled down, also, to his task, and their united efforts set the boat in motion according to Sol's wishes. It floated lazily along, while the strangers, silent now, clung to it as before.

The life-saver did not find his work easy, but his courage was good, and he persevered.

All at once something happened which surprised him. A bright light flamed up on top of the boat, and, looking, he saw that the girl had set a newspaper on fire. Considering that she had been greatly alarmed only a moment before, this now seemed peculiar, but, as she had a comfortable position, there was no reason why she should not spare time to do it, if she wished.

"Your friend can see where we are, now," he remarked.

"Jes' so," the young raftsmen replied, briefly.

The flame flared up brightly, and Sol realized with uneasiness that it was like a signal-light.

It would be visible from both shores, and might reach the eyes of others. Perhaps others would come to investigate. The boy could not help noticing, then, how calm the young woman was. It spoke well for her nerves if she had so soon recovered from severe fright.

The transient light went out, and they were left in the fast-gathering night to struggle on.

The matter was not prolonged. The boat and the raft drew near each other, and, when they touched, it was not a long task to transfer all to the latter. The young woman took Ned's hand and went first; then both the boys gave the man a lift; Sol, himself, followed, and all were safely upon the raft.

"Jimmy," as the man had been called, shook both Sol and Ned by the hand fervently.

"May all blessings rest upon you!" he exclaimed, tremulously. "My life may not be very precious to any one but myself, but this girl, Eliza, is very different. You have done a noble, heroic work, for which accept my warmest thanks!"

"And mine, too!" added Eliza. "Your mothers must be proud of such sublime sons, and I will pray with her for you!"

Sol and Ned thought this rather exaggerated language, but they made allowance for the peril the couple had been in.

"Don't mention it," Sol cheerfully returned. "It is jest in our line o' biz, fur we are fresh-water sailors, an' we always ketch all the fish we kin. Glad ter have helped ye. But how'd it happen?"

Both of the rescued persons had sunk down, seeming to be very much exhausted.

"I was rowing the boat," Jimmy explained, "and I caught one oar on something which I did not see. The oar broke, I pitched overboard, and the boat upset."

"Kinder peculiar."

"Unpleasant, too."

"Should say so. Wal, see hyar: we're driftin' funder off all the time; reckon we had better land an' put ye ashore."

"Must we leave?"

"Must ye leave?"

"Yes."

"Don't ye want ter?"

"To be frank, we are in hard luck. We belong in New York City. We were up here on business, and short of funds. We hired this boat to cross the river and take the West Shore Railroad, after making sure we had money enough to buy tickets for Orangeburgh, where we have friends. It was a close call, with only a few cents margin, and Eliza was again counting the money, to see if it was a go, when the boat capsized. The result is, all our money is lost."

"Oh! oh!" moaned Eliza.

Ned looked at the alleged unfortunate pair sympathetically, but, if there had been light instead of darkness, a look would have been seen on Sol's face, expressive of slight doubt.

"Money all gone, eh?" he returned.

"Yes; we are penniless, and among strangers. We can't go anywhere on the cars, nor can we buy lodgings for the night."

"They can stay here, Sol, can't they?" asked generous Ned.

There was only one answer for the second boy to make, and he made it. He had not been favorably impressed by Jimmy and Eliza, but he was inclined to do what was right, and he threw off his prejudice.

"Plenty of room," he agreed. "Our raft ain't so fast as an Express train, but we reckon it will get there just the same."

Jimmy looked about in wonder.

"What kind of a craft is this?" he asked.

"A raft, as I said before."

"Well, it's a queer one!"

He spoke with an air of surprise, and there was reason for it. Such a raft had rarely been seen on the Hudson River, and, perhaps, never in that decade. It was of good size, and buoyant enough so that the deck, so called, was generally dry, though some water broke over it now and then.

In the center was a box-like elevation, four feet above the general level, and upon this was piled what seemed to be merchandise, though, as all was covered over, it was not easy to tell what was there.

"It's our own invention!" announced Ned, proudly.

"For fun?"

"Not much!—for business. We're moving!"

"Moving!" echoed Jimmy, blankly.

"Yes. You've heard how the early settlers in Kentucky used to go down the Ohio River in flat-boats, to get to their new homes, of course."

"No; I never did."

Ned looked at Jimmy in astonishment, pity and disgust. He could not conceive how any one could be ignorant of an era in American history which, grim, hard and full of deadly peril as it was for those who participated, was full of romance, interest and fascination to those of Ned's day. The explanation was simple—Ned, having been a reader, was intelligent, but Jimmy had been an idle vagabond in a great city, and knew little outside of horse-racing, pugilistic matters, and the price of beer.

"Well," Ned explained, after a pause, "that was the only way the early settlers had, and they went down the river in flat-boats. Our poverty has led us to undertake a like way."

"Jolly, ain't it?"

"It is, some. Are you rested?"

Jimmy arose and shook himself.

"Yes; but I'm wet."

"I wish we could give you and the young lady dry clothes—especially her—but we haven't any."

"I'm not much wet," answered Eliza. "You see, I was right on top of the boat, and kept pretty dry."

The explanation did not seem to cover the whole ground, and account for the fact that, after being tipped out of a boat, she certainly was quite dry, but it passed without comment.

"Now, come into our cabin," Ned directed.

He led the way, and the rescued persons followed. Saltpeter Sol remained on deck.

"I don't more than half like them folks!" he muttered, looking after them. "I've seen such before, when I was livin' in New York. They b'long ter the lower sub-stratum o' life. That don't make 'em any the wuss; I'm free ter say it, fur I sprung from jest the same stratum, I reckon; but it strikes me they hev a sort o' tough look, as ef they hev never tried ter rise from their stratum. Hows'ever, I reckon it don't matter; they're welcome ter their ride."

The cabin of the novel craft, as seen by Jimmy and Eliza, proved to be a compartment six feet wide and twelve long. Its floor was two feet below the level of the deck, and it extended upward to the box-like elevation before mentioned.

"Well, this is a great place!" Jimmy declared.

"Good enough to sleep in," Ned agreed.

"I should say so."

"Did you make it?" asked Eliza.

"Sol and I did."

"If you will let us stay with you, we shall be very grateful."

"Oh! that's all right. We are poor, and have no real accommodations, but you are welcome to all we have."

"You're very good, and that's a fact. By the way, I haven't introduced myself. I'm Jimmy Flocton, and this is Eliza Burch."

And he swung his hand toward the young woman.

"Glad to meet you. My messmate is Sol Wayne, and I am Ned Brampton. Now, I'll go on deck, and you can make yourselves comfortable, here, and come up when you feel like it."

"We'll be up afore a great while."

Ned left them, and then Jimmy turned to his companion and facetiously poked her in the ribs with his finger.

"Hey! Lize, old lady, how's this for high?" he asked.

"We're here."

"I should say so, and them precious kids don't suspect a thing. The boodle is ours!"

"Don't count your chickens until they're hatched, old man."

"Do you think we shall fail? I think not! The boodle is here, and we'll have it or break a leg."

"Jimmy, don't you do harm to them boys!" commanded Eliza, with spirit.

"Hoity-toity! What's struck you, old woman?"

"They're nice boys, and I won't see them killed!"

"Bah!" retorted Flocton. "Who said anything about doing them up? It won't be necessary. If it was—well, I ain't no soft-hearted chicken, b'gosh!"

CHAPTER II.

A SINGULAR ENTERPRISE.

THE raft had been built under peculiar circumstances.

Edwin Brampton had been an orphan ever since he was eight years old, and Thomas Lake had been his guardian. Property consisting of a house and a lumber-yard had been left to him, though the house was under mortgage.

Lake had continued the lumber business until within a few months, when he began to dispose of the stock and refused to buy more. He was a "great man" in that country town on the upper Hudson, and no one ever questioned his right to do as he pleased.

This was unfortunate, for, one day, the sleepy town'speople awoke to the fact that Lake had disappeared, after defrauding every one he could. He had borrowed money, forged notes, and taken other means of raising cash, and gone to parts unknown.

Ned Brampton was the chief loser. When he came to figure up the assets, and get at the situation, he found that he had nothing in the world except some household furniture and a small quantity of lumber.

Lake had taken what little money Ned had, and put a second mortgage on the house which covered it for its entire value.

The youth was sixteen years old, intelligent and well educated, and willing to work, but he no longer wished to work in the town. It had been the scene of too many disappointments, afflictions and misfortunes.

One day he met a friend, Sol Wayne, often called Saltpeter Sol, because he was wide-awake to an unusual degree.

"He's got life, pluck and determination," an old army officer had said of him, "and, these, like saltpeter, sulphur and charcoal, make an explosive that tells in every battle."

And from that day the lad was called Saltpeter Sol.

He was a graduate of the Sixth Ward, in New York. His father had been lazy, and his mother none-too-well, and overworked by the care of a large family. Sol drifted into the care of a charitable institution on Paradise Park, better known as the Five Points, and, later was sent into the country. He was a brisk young fellow, honest and deserving, and nobody thought the less of him because he came from a charitable home.

On this occasion he greeted Ned cheerfully.

"Hullo, E. B.! You look as ef you'd got an idee."

"I have," Ned answered.

"What is it?"

"I'm going to leave this town!"

"You don't say so."

"Yes. I wrote to an old friend of my father, who lives at Peekskill, asking if he could give me work. He wrote back that he would, and that I could come any time I saw fit."

"So you're off?"

"I don't know. My parents' household things are all here, and I'm ordered to move them. I want to take them to Peekskill, but I haven't the money to pay the freight, or even my own fare."

"Borrow?"

"Of whom?"

"Not o' me, sartain, fur I ain't got a dollar. But somebody ought ter lend."

"To a penniless boy?"

"Why not write to the Peekskill man?"

"No. I can't ask any more of him; it's enough that he should give me a job."

"Then what will ye do?"

"I've been thinking. There is some lumber still left in the yard. The question is, can I build a raft that will take both me and my goods down the river, free of expense?"

"B'jinks! that is an idee!"

"They used to do it in pioneer days," added Ned, warming to his subject. "Families going to settle in Kentucky used to float down the Ohio on flat-boats. They had terrible times with the Indians, but there are no Indians along the Hudson. Now, do you think I can make and use a raft as I have suggested?"

The idea was only crude and vague then, but it grew. Saltpeter Sol entered into it eagerly, and he and Ned planned anew. It occurred to the former that the necessary money could be obtained by selling the lumber, instead of making it into a raft, but the scheme had become too fascinating to be cast away.

They began to build the raft, and pushed the work remarkably. Much sooner than was to be expected it was finished, and lay by the river-bank, ready for the voyage.

It was done with ingenuity. They had considered all things likely to occur; had developed rare mechanical skill, and even the old boat-builder of the village was greatly surprised when he saw the result.

The raft was likely to be a remarkable sailor, as rafts went, and very comfortable.

Later, the goods were loaded, the most valuable going into the cabin, but the others being on the upper deck, properly covered.

The time came when the start was made. They left the village and the shore, committed themselves to the current of the Hudson, and were off on their eventful voyage.

"We'll name it the Flyin' Fish!" Saltpeter Sol declared, and the name was formally given.

If the raft did not "fly," it did go better than any one would suppose. A steering apparatus, which had been arranged, worked well, and there was no swinging about at hap-hazard. Everything indicated a peaceful, successful trip, but the first night brought an adventure.

They made for the eastern bank, where the water was deep, and tied the Flying Fish to a rock. In the hours of darkness they were aroused by a prowler, who proved to be a man.

Ned seized him, but, after a struggle in which both boys took part, the unknown escaped.

"A tramp," was the voyagers' decision.

This was a comfortable and natural belief, but they were destined to change it before the voyage was over. From the time when they left the village they were the objects of a plot which brought danger in its track, and they were floating into the peril blindly.

It was on the evening of the second day that Jimmy Flocton and Eliza Burch joined them.

When Ned left the rescued pair in the cabin and went again on deck, he found that Sol had lighted up the raft. This was accomplished by means of a red lantern at either end, and a

plain lantern which gave them more useful light.

"What are you looking at so sharply, Sol?" asked young Brampton.

"Hain't we better 'tie-up' early to-night?"

"Yes."

"I've been thinkin' that ef we kin keep away from shore we may save a good 'eal o' trouble. I don't want no more tramps pokin' around over the Flyin' Fish."

"Nor I."

"Then let's pull up ag'in' some island."

"A capital idee."

"I'm lookin' fur one now."

"Do you know this part of the river?"

"No."

"Nor I."

"Never mind; we'll find the island, jest the same. How's our guests?"

"Weary and grateful."

Saltpeter Sol hesitated for a moment.

"Ef we had any vallybles here I wouldn't trust them folks around."

"I'm not in love with them myself, but I guess they're all right," Ned replied.

"I've seen the like o' them before. Go down on the Bowery, in New York, and you'll see them any day. Jimmy is a tough from Toughville, in his looks, though he may not be vicious, really; an' Eliza is a bird who runs a sharp tongue, an' wears clothes that fit her like a meal-bag on a lamp-post—I've seen lots o' them damsels in New York, at times."

"You certainly are *not* stuck on our guests, but they can do us no harm, even if they wanted to."

"Oh! I presume they're all right."

Conversation ceased. They were passing a large village, and the lights looked beautiful enough. However, the amateur sailors were satisfied with their own quarters, and they gave attention to finding a safe "camping-place," as Sol, with a weakness for terms suitable to their condition, gravely expressed it.

In this they were successful after going about a mile further. A small island appeared, and they made for it at once. The steering-apparatus needed only a slight change, and they gradually approached land.

The island was small, containing but little over an acre, but well fitted for their purpose. A part of it had a growth of bushes, and, instead of being wholly a mud-flat, it was high enough to present a slight bank, and make it safe to approach without running aground.

The boys had learned well how to manage it, and the Flying Fish was brought up to the bank with a remarkable degree of success, though it was due as much to luck as anything else.

Ned caught sight of a rock, and ran to the stern. There a rope was all ready for him, with a noose in the loose end, and he cast it over the rock. The Flying Fish floated a trifle further; the rope tightened, and they were anchored as securely as they could wish.

Just then Jimmy Flocton came out of the cabin.

CHAPTER III.

DANGER FOR THE NAVIGATORS.

"WHAT'S this?" Jimmy demanded. "Have we run aground?"

"Only anchored for the night," Sol answered.

"What is that for?"

"We want ter sleep, an' we can't do that an' navigate."

"I'll take that post."

"Thank ye; but this is our reg'lar way."

"Is this the bank?"

"No; only an island."

Jimmy looked disapprovingly at the land.

"We're losing time here," he added.

"Wal, we've got the whole summer ahead on us."

"I'm in a hurry, boys, and I'll act as sailor if you'll let me. Just you go ter bed, and let me sail this gun-boat."

"Sorry ter refuse, but the Flyin' Fish is anchored, an' hyar we stop fur the night!"

Saltpeter Sol was annoyed by their passenger's persistence, and he made this reply somewhat curtly.

Jimmy laughed.

"Suppose we ketch malaria off these flats?"

"We ain't troubled."

"Have you quinine along?"

"Nary quinn!"

"I reckon we shall pull through," Flocton continued, cheerfully; "and I don't know as I am very sorry we are here. True, I'm in a hurry, but time won't run away from us. What island is this?"

"Don't know it's name?"

"No village near, is there?"

"Don't see any."

"Have you landed, to look it over?"

"No."

"I believe I will. I like to see what my surroundings be, and the island looks inviting."

Without waiting for a reply Jimmy sprang ashore, and walked off at once.

"Reckon we'd better app'int him admiral," observed Sol, ungraciously. "He wants ter run the whole biz, anyhow."

"We're not compelled to let him," Ned answered.

"I should remark *not*!" promptly returned the New York boy. "This is our man-o'-war, not his'n: an' ef he don't like the cap'n, an' the way things is run, he kin git out an' walk. Jes' so, by N. Bonaparte!"

"You don't like Jimmy," said Ned, laughing.

"Do you?"

"Not very much."

"Ef I had a dollar in my pocket I wouldn't trust the chap around, but we ain't got a thing that kin arouse his cooipidity. Oh! I das' say J. F. is all right, but I don't like his style overly."

Jimmy had disappeared in the bushes. Not being particularly interested in his explorations, the boys set about making preparations for the night. This task had just been completed when Eliza Burch came out of the cabin.

"The night is dark," she observed, looking around.

"Yes'm," Ned agreed.

"Shall we have rain?"

"I don't think so."

"Why, we're aground!"

"Yes."

"Why is this?"

Eliza seemed to be as much interested as Jimmy, though not annoyed. Ned explained the situation. She listened attentively, but in silence. When he was done she hesitatingly asked:

"Hain't you better cast off and float on?"

"Why?"

"I don't like this place."

"Why not?"

"We are close to the river-bank, and—are you sure—we shall—be safe?"

Her hesitating speech was noticeable, but neither Ned nor Sol thought of placing any decided construction upon it.

"Why shouldn't we be safe?"

"Lawless men might come from the shore."

"Oh! they won't swim over to the island to get at us, and tramps—our only foes—have no boats, you know."

"Yes, but—"

A footstep sounded on the rocks of the island. Eliza turned quickly and saw Flocton returning.

"Probably you are right," she added, hurriedly. "Don't mention what I said!—I was foolish and—nervous!"

Jimmy leaped to the deck.

"A prime place!" he declared. "The island is just the kind of a backer you need, and you are lucky to have found it. We shall rest here as snug as you please, and be rid of the danger of being run down by a big boat in the darkness."

His change of base was radical, but Ned did not look upon this with suspicion. Both of the rescued persons had conducted themselves with a degree of circumspection when near the young raftsmen, and, as the latter had not heard the secret conversation in the cabin, they had no good reason to be suspicious.

Jimmy talked glibly for awhile, and then, going near to Eliza, pinched her arm.

"Softly!" he directed. "I want to chin with you. Get apart from the kids."

He sauntered to the rear of the raft, and Eliza soon followed.

"The Old Nick helps his own!" Flocton declared.

"What is it, now?"

"The landing of the kids here has played right into our hands!"

"How?"

"Why, when the job is done we sha'n't have an atom of trouble in getting to shore. The island is not cut off from land as they think. There is a sort of bar, where the water is not over two feet deep, anywhere, and, just where it is deepest, there are rocks that stick up. You can go away dry-footed, though you may get some mud on your dainty feet."

"I'm half sick of this job!"

"Why?"

"It's a mean thing to trouble these boys!"

"Now, Lize, you come off! Don't get on the sentimental lay, again."

"Why should we prey on children?"

"Hawks ketch chickens. Why shouldn't we?"

"We've never wanted for money, and there are men enough now who would pay you well to crack a crib, or do anything in your line. I've never refused to be a decoy for you, but this job goes against my grain."

"Rubbish!"

"The man who hired you to do this was a fiend, and we are no better."

"You fool!" Flocton muttered, savagely.

"Call me what you will, but one thing you may as well understand—if you do harm to these boys, I blow on you!"

"You will?" cried Jimmy, furiously.

"Yes, I will!" was the defiant answer.

"Do it, and I'll—"

"You'll what?"

"Never mind; don't let us quarrel, Lize. I know you're a prize-package girl, and won't do half as bad as you say."

"And I say I won't have you injure the boys!" Eliza reiterated.

"Rest easy, old woman; I promise that I won't do them up. The 'stuff,' however, we must have. We get a boodle for nabbing it, and I ain't the lad to let no chance slip. Mind that? But it won't be necessary to harm the kids; all is to be done on the sly. That's orders. If there was to be a racket, would I have brought you? Not much! I told you, first off, that you were to come along as a blind, so they wouldn't suspect."

"It's mean to rob them."

"Say it again! Great Scott! I think it's fun. And they ain't got a suspicion that there is a boodle on the raft!"

Jimmy seemed to see a great joke in the fact, and he chuckled a long while over it.

Eliza was silent. Knowing of old that Flocton's word was valueless, she was by no means sure that the boys would not be harmed, but her confederate had talked her into silence. She stood looking off into the darkness in gloomy thought. She was Flocton's wife, and, with him, she was treading a path of crime. Her better self was not wholly gone, and there were times when her conscience grew active, but Jimmy exercised great influence over her, and drew her along as he wished.

And her steps were ever along the downward road.

Flocton finally aroused her roughly, and they rejoined the young raftsmen.

Saltpeter Sol was more than ever inclined to dislike the guests, and he bestowed no ceremony upon them, but Ned Brampton was more hospitable. He suggested that all go into the cabin, and they went.

A lamp was lighted, and they sat down. Jimmy seemed to feel called upon to say a good deal, and he said it. He talked like a race-horse, and told stories which he, himself, thought so funny that he laughed loud and long, at intervals.

Ned smiled, too, in duty bound, but Sol was sulky and silent, and Eliza closed her eyes and feigned sleep.

Sol studied her face curiously, and could not fail to see that she was dissatisfied and gloomy. This was not surprising, he thought, if she had to keep Jimmy's company, so, though he thought a good deal, he formed no definite opinions.

Several attempts to draw him into conversation failed, but, at last, he spoke abruptly:

"Time to turn in!"

"Tis getting late," Flocton agreed.

"We'll adjourn."

"All right; Lize and I will leave you here, and go on deck."

"The young lady is to have the cabin," Ned explained, "and the rest of us will sleep on deck."

"I can't agree to that!" Jimmy declared, hastily.

"Why not?"

"Lize and I won't rob you of your quarters. She and I will sleep on deck."

"In the open air?"

"Yes. You don't mind it, do you, Lize?"

"No," she replied, sullenly.

"Then we'll do it."

"Did it ever occur ter you that Ned Brampton an' me are cap'n an' first mate here?" abruptly asked Saltpeter Sol.

"Why, of course you are, but—"

"Then our word goes!"

"Yes, but—"

"You've heerd the programme. The gal is ter hev the cabin, an' we three is ter sleep on deck. So Captain Ned B. has said, an' what he says, goes. We'll sleep 'cordin' ter the bill o' ladin', or we will go ashore an' git more fastid'us quarters, whar we kin sleep on the roof. Ketch on?"

There was nothing coarse or vulgarly stubborn about Sol's way of speaking, but it was full of quiet determination.

Flocton's face flushed with anger.

CHAPTER IV.

A GRAPPLE IN THE DARK.

EVERYTHING pointed to an outbreak, but Jimmy, angry as he was, realized the need of caution and controlled his reckless tongue.

"It don't seem right to drive you out of your quarters," he remarked, pacifically.

"We're all right," asserted Ned.

"Lize and I would be glad to take the deck."

"We couldn't think of it."

"An' we won't!" added Sol, under his breath.

"We yield to your way, of course," returned Flocton, ungraciously. "And I, for one, am ready to turn in."

All arose. Jimmy gave Eliza a warning, knowing glance, and then moved toward the cabin exit. He and the raftsmen went on deck.

"You will find a recess among the goods, right there," explained Ned, "and you'll get cover simply by dropping the canvas after you crawl in. You'll be free from all dew and raw winds."

"Thank ye, cully!"

Flocton tried to be jovial, and he lost no time in crawling into the recess named. Sol and Ned went to another, which was just like it. Little conversation passed between them as they settled down. Sol was not yet ready to forgive his friend for being so hospitable to those he did not like, and, though friendly, he did not encourage useless speech.

Ned was weary, and, having nothing upon his mind, he soon fell asleep.

Sol noted the fact with satisfaction which was somewhat dimmed by a resolution he had made. He arose, moved his blankets to suit himself, and lay down near the opening of the recess. By moving the canvas which hung over the entrance a trifle he could gain view of a large part of the deck, and this he proceeded to do.

He had determined to keep a watch through the night, and make sure that no harm came to themselves or the Flying Fish.

"That Jimmy Crook is a tough one, an' don't mean any good!" he murmured, to fortify his resolution. "I'll bet my last year's shoes he's a sand-bagger when he's at home on the Bowery, an' that his pictur' shows up in the Rogues' Gallery. He's built jest that way. But he don't want ter come no shines on this palace steamer, fur thar's a chap at the foretop-gallant, main-mast cross-trees, on watch, an' that same is S. Saltpeter, Esquire!"

The worthy young raftsmen was a trifle weak in his nautical phrases, but, having gone on a voyage, he was bound to talk as near like one bred to the salt, rolling waves as possible.

It was easy to resolve to keep awake, but not so easy to do it. The situation was peaceful and quiet, and the barely-audible rippling of the water, and the gentle rocking of the raft, were like being rocked in a cradle and sung to in strange measures. It had effect upon Sol. He kept awake bravely until an hour had passed, but the sleep lost on the previous night made it hard to resist Nature.

The rippling sound of the water grew fainter; it seemed to be miles away, and then Sol Wayne slept.

Two hours more passed. It was about midnight. All was quiet on the raft; the night remained dark and cloudy.

Suddenly Sol awoke. At that time he did not know what caused it, but when, the next day, a mouse was found on the raft, he understood his vague impression that some small object had run across his face. His nerves were good, and he did not start. He improved the chance to look out again, however.

He could see the canvas that hung over the recess where Jimmy Flocton had gone to sleep; it hung without motion.

"Wonder ef J. F. is in thar?" mused the raftsmen. "I've fell asleep at the main-mast cross-trees topgallant sails, fur which I ought ter be court-martialed. Wonder what Stowaway J. Flock has been doin', meanwhile? I'd like ter peek inter his bunk!"

The canvas stirred in front of Jimmy's "bunk," yet there was not much wind stirring. One corner of the curtain was pushed aside, and a white face became visible in the darkness.

"Cap'n Kidd is reconnoiterin'!" thought the master of the Flying Fish, in sudden excitement.

The face remained stationary, as though its owner was listening and looking. Sol followed his example, but took care not to make himself visible.

A long pause ensued, and then Flocton crawled out of the recess. He used the utmost care, and not a sound betrayed his movements; if Sol had not been on the watch, he would not have heard him at all.

The skulker's gaze was upon the boys' quarters, and he crept that way. Sol released the small corner of the curtain which he held, and prepared to feign sleep. He expected Flocton to look inside, but the latter, after reaching the curtain, stopped again.

Evidently he intended to satisfy himself by means of his ears, not by his eyes.

After awhile the raftsmen heard him turn away, and then Sol again looked out. He saw Jimmy climbing upon the cargo.

It now became clear that the passenger had some secret scheme afoot, and young Wayne was resolved to watch him. This he could not do from his present position, so he crept out boldly but quietly.

Jimmy was among Ned's furniture, turning over the various articles, peering under the covering here and there, and acting like anything but an honest man.

"The measly scamp!" muttered Sol; "I knowed he was no good from the first, an' now I reckon he's a thief. Shall I jump on him? No; I'll wait a bit, an' see w'ot he finds."

This decision was all right, at first, but it did not remain so. The man, failing to find what he wanted, began to disarrange the carefully-laden cargo in a way which aroused Sol's anger afresh. If Flocton was allowed to go on he would make several hours' work for them.

The raftsmen sprang to the top of the cargo.

"Drop it!" he commanded.

Jimmy started up, and, so startled was he, he obeyed the figurative order literally and did drop an article he chanced to have in his hand. He gazed at the raftsmen in bewildered dismay.

"You'd better hire out as a 'longshoreman!'" Sol sarcastically added.

"Eh?"

"What yer doin' there!"

"I was—I was hunting for a knife I dropped," stammered Flocton.

"Yes, you was! Tell that ter the marines! I've had my eye on you, old chap, an'—"

"I'll fix things all right."

"No, ye won't; you've poked enough in that cargo. Let it alone!"

"Can't I get my knife?"

"Rubbish! You ain't lost no knife. I've had an eye on ye ever sence you crawled out o' yer den. I see how you skulked, an' come to listen at my curtain, an' tried ter be so sly. You're a thief! that's what you be!"

"You're a liar!" cried Flocton, hotly.

"Don't put your cap on my head."

"Pretty way you have of using folks!"

"I s'pose your way is all right, eh?"

"Now, look here, young feller, I've had enough of your cheap talk!" Jimmy declared.

"You dry up, or you'll git hurt."

"I ain't afeerd o' you!"

"You ain't?"

"No, sirree."

Flocton advanced a step.

"I'm a good mind ter do you up!" he asserted.

"But you won't. I'll tell ye what ye will do; you'll leave this raft, right off, quick!"

"What!"

"Skip!"

"You don't mean it."

"You bet, I do! I don't keer ter have no thieves aboard. I've been s'pish'us o' you from the first, an' hev watched you. I knowed you'd try mischief ter-night; I set out ter ketch ye, an' I hev!"

Jimmy was silent. He looked hard at Saltpeter Sol, as if considering the chances of the situation. He saw himself badly placed; he had come aboard the raft by means of a prearranged scheme, and with a fixed purpose. He had been baffled in his attempt to carry out the plot secretly, and it was plain that he must now give it up or rely upon other than secret measures.

There was too much at stake, from his point of view, to yield without an effort, and he made new and sudden move.

Without any warning he sprang upon the boy raftsmen.

Sol had been expecting this, and was ready for it. He had taken along a wooden club, well fitted for offense or defense. This he had kept concealed, but ready for use, and, when the ruffian made his attack, the raftsmen, without giving way a foot, aimed a swinging blow at his enemy.

If his aim had been perfect his execution would have brought speedy victory, but the extemporized weapon only gave a glancing blow to Flocton's head.

He dropped to his knees under its force, but was not disabled. More than that he fell close to Sol, and at once flung his arms around the young hero's waist.

"Curse you!" he hissed; "I'll drown you in the river!"

"Ketch yer game, first!" retorted Sol.

He tried to break away, following up his first blow with others as he did so; but cunning Jimmy had his head under the boy's arm, where it was safe.

He dragged Sol toward the edge of the raft.

"Down you go, ter feed the fish!" he exclaimed, in hot anger.

CHAPTER V.

THE THREAT OF AN ENEMY.

SALTPETER SOL struggled in vain. He was strong, but he had neither the strength nor weight to resist successfully one so much older than he.

Despite all he could do he was forced toward the edge of the upper deck and, too proud to call for help, he seemed about to be flung into the river.

Jimmy's purpose was frustrated, however. Almost at the last moment he was seized by another pair of hands, and pulled back so vigorously that he fell over a protuberance of the cargo. As he went down his hold on Sol was broken. Both leaped up quickly, but the one was out of the other's reach.

The ruffian looked to see who had interfered, and grew pale with anger as he saw that it was Eliza.

"You she-devil!" he hissed.

Not a word did she answer.

"How dare you?" he added, hoarsely.

"I wouldn't see you hurt him!" the girl declared, while the resolution in her voice did not wholly hide a hopeless, despairing element therein.

"Who was going to hurt him?"

"I saw what I saw."

"You may see more!" Flocton blustered.

"Hush!" she exclaimed.

"Hush, is it? You dry up, Lize, or I'll make short work of you!"

"Kill me, if you will; I don't care."

"But I do," interrupted Sol. "Mister Robert Kidd, pirate, ain't goin' ter kick up no more rumpus on this man-o'-war. He's had his day, an' his sun has set. I've had my opinion o' him from the first, an' I know, now, that 'twas right. Sech snakes as you, Pirate Kidd, ain't wanted hyar—you kin skip!"

"Are you my boss?" retorted Flocton.

"I'm boss o' this raft."

"You can't buldoze me."

"Nobody wants ter, but your room is better nor your company. Skip!"

"I'll go when I get ready!"

"Jimmy," said unfortunate Eliza, persuasively, "let us leave here."

"You traitress!" shouted Flocton, "how dare you speak to me?"

"We will talk on shore."

The ruffian stood in sullen anger and irresolution. What was he to do? His gaze wandered along the canvas-covered cargo. Somewhere there was an article he coveted, and he was tempted to secure it at all hazards. It was money in his pocket—strangely enough, more money than Ned Brampton would have supposed the whole cargo worth. If Flocton could take the article to the mysterious man who had hired him to make the attempt he would be well paid.

Ned came on deck, awakened by the noise of quarreling, and wondering what it was all about; but that did not influence their enemy. He felt capable of disposing of both Ned and Sol, and was tempted to do it.

If hard pressed he had a revolver in his pocket—he shrunk a little at the thought. Evil as he was he had never yet taken human life, and he hesitated to do it—hesitated, but not because his conscience rebelled. Like a good many others of his kind, he feared the law he had often violated.

It was Eliza who broke the long silence.

"Come!" she urged, persuasively, taking his arm.

He shook off her hold roughly.

"Let me alone!" he snarled.

"If you will go ashore with me I will—"

"Don't you think o' goin', miss!" protested Sol. "You ain't safe with this critter. You're of a different stripe, ef you do keep bad company. You stay here with us—"

"She won't stay!" almost shouted Flocton.

"She will, ef she wants ter!"

"Look here, my seven-by-nine bantam, who are you to dictate to me? You hush up, or I'll punch your head! When I say 'Go!' to this gal,

she goes; when I say 'Come!' she comes. And don't you forget it!"

"And don't you forgit that Ned an' I are boss here!" retorted the undismayed raftsman. "Ef she wants to stay, she shall. I advise her to. As for you," and here Sol's voice changed to one of sarcasm, "when I say 'Go!' you take a skip; an' when I say 'Come!'—wal, when I do say it, you kin take me ter a horse-pittle fur clams an' ijijits!"

"Don't you be too fly!" Flocton cautioned. "I'll go ashore as you say, but it may be I shall turn up again. Don't think you seen the last of me! It may be a week, or a month, or a year, but you shall pay the debt you owe me. I came here peaceably, molesting nobody, and you've jumped on me—"

"Rats!" was Sol's inelegant, but expressive reply.

"And you'll hear from me ag'in!"

With this sullen conclusion Jimmy turned to his ally.

"Come!" he said, curtly.

He turned and stalked away. Sol looked at Eliza, ready to take her part if necessary, and on slight invitation, but she did not look at him. She followed Flocton.

As she passed Sol, however, she spoke three words in a low voice:

"Watch every night!"

And then she flitted past him.

They left the raft and took to the island. Even then, Sol, who felt for her deeply, was tempted to call her back, and press the offer of shelter upon her, but it was so clear that she was determined to follow Jimmy with the dog-like obedience before evidenced that he controlled the impulse.

"What in the world is it, Sol?" Ned asked, in deep wonder.

"That snake tried to rob us."

"He did?"

"You bet!"

"But what have we got that he should want?"

"We'll speak o' that later. Jest now, I'm goin' ter see that they really go. That's a dry road ter the river-bank, but they may not see fit to take it. Wait until I come back."

He leaped from the boat. Flocton and Eliza had disappeared in the darkness, but, after crossing the island, he saw them going along the narrow track to the shore. He led, and she followed with the same dog-like docility.

"Wish I knew she'd be safe!" muttered Sol.

"That scamp is mad clear through over his failure, an' he must blame it good 'eal onter her. I hope he won't do her any harm!"

It was a serious thought, and the fear could not be ridiculed. Flocton was evil and cruel enough for anything, and Eliza had incurred his deepest anger.

The raftsman went back to Ned after watching the couple out of sight.

"Our live cargo is gone," he observed.

"Why, Sol? I'm all in a maze," Ned confessed.

"Lucky you ain't worse!"

"Are they as bad as you say?"

"Worse! But set down an' hear the story."

He told it all in plain, concise terms, referring first to his suspicions against Flocton, and then to his espionage and the result.

Ned was bewildered.

"Why, it looks like a regular plot!"

"So it was, I make no doubt."

"But why should they do it? What have we here to tempt them?"

"Don't know, unless Jimmy Pirate Kidd wanted ter run off with the sofa, or a chair."

"Perhaps it was thought we might have valuables."

"The critter seemed ter hunt for somethin' he did not find."

Ned shook his head.

"I can't see what it was."

"Now, messmate, I hev an idee that Pirate J. Kidd was the very same chap, lookin' ter be a tramp, who tackled us last night."

"No!"

"I'll bet cash on it."

"Then he is desperately in earnest."

"Jes' so; an' you know he said we hadn't seen the last o' him. Now, whatever the racket is, we hev got ter be expectin' trouble all the way down the river. When we least expect it he an' mebbe, his heelers, may jump onter us, an' the ways an' the means no man kin tell. How d'ye like the outlook? We ain't got any weapons, but we must always be on the watch to see an' meet danger!"

Ned look at his friend in momentary dismay, but he was of a brave nature, and Sol's own coolness soon communicated itself to him.

It was hard to understand why any one should

mean them harm, or covet any of the simple effects Ned was rafting down the river so humbly, but, let the cause be what it might, it was not their way to yield tamely.

They resolved to stand up for their rights.

They went to work and rearranged the portions of the cargo which Flocton had meddled with. Then they considered whether to go to sleep. It looked dangerous, but they could not act as navigators and keep awake night and day.

The discussion ended with Sol taking a trip across the island to the mainland. He failed to find any signs of their enemy, and they decided to lie down and take the risk.

Before turning in it was noticed that the clouds were growing heavier, making the night very dark, and giving indications of a coming day of rain.

They retired to the cabin, lay down and were soon asleep.

Once more they were destined to be aroused, and that, too, rudely. Hours had passed when there was a sudden shock, and they awoke with the impression that the raft had been ground to pieces.

They sprang to their feet in alarm.

CHAPTER VI.

RUN DOWN AT NIGHT.

"WE'RE sinking!" Ned exclaimed.

"What should sink us?"

"Maybe, it's Flocton, again!"

"Then let him look out!"

The raftsmen were rushing for the cabin exit as they spoke, and as Saltpeter Sol uttered the last word he tore the door open. As he did so a scream of terror arose outside:

"Help! help!"

"Another trick by Jim Kidd!" muttered Sol.

"I don't think so. Come on!"

Ned left the cabin and boldly sprang up on the upper deck. Then the cause of the disturbance became evident at a glance. By the side of the raft lay a yacht, and its position in the water showed that it had met with trouble. It was not hard to surmise that it had run into the raft in the darkness, for the latter's red light at the stern had gone out.

Several persons were to be seen on its deck, and the sight of two more in the water told another plain story.

Sol leaped into the river, swum to the side of the others, and found them to be a man and a woman.

"Give me a lift!" requested the former, weakly.

"Ay, ay!"

Sol spoke with what he considered sailor heartiness, and proceeded to render all the aid he could. The woman was lifted back upon the yacht, and the rescuers followed.

"We're sinking!" called out a voice.

"Can't something be done?" another person asked.

"No. Don't you see how the yacht has gone down?"

"Can't we run her into shallow water?"

"It can't be deep here, and I think we had better look out for ourselves."

"Then clamber onto the raft."

Sol let them do all the talking. Blameless as he was, he felt guilty that the Flying Fish should have been in their way to do such damage, and could not command his voice to tender the hospitality of the raft. There was a general rush, however, for the more substantial craft, and all were soon aboard the Flying Fish.

"What in the world have we here?" demanded one of the previous speakers.

Sol rallied.

"We've got a raft," was his practical reply.

"It has sunk us."

"I'm sorry, sir, but we ain't nowhar nigh the middle o' the river."

"Investigation will probably prove you blameless. Being in haste I insisted upon my men going forward in this pitch darkness. I won't say they were careless, just now. Let us grapple with one fact, only; we are wrecked!"

"The yacht may not be badly injured, Mr. Fordrest," reminded one of his companions.

"Certainly, a hole is stove in her."

"It may be slight."

"Time will tell. As for my trip to New York, I cannot get there on time, and I may as well give it up cheerfully. Let us see just how we are situated. Who has charge of this raft?"

"Cap'n Ned an' me!"

Sol Wayne pointed to his friend, while Fordrest looked in surprise.

"You don't mean to say that you two boys are in charge, do you?"

"Wal, considerin' that we are the only human

bein's of the outfit—the crew, I mean—one of us must be the cap'n."

"Are you out for business or pleasure?"

"Business, ev'ry time. This hyar craft is the raft-o'-war, Flyin' Fish, a merchant ship o' the Independent Line, bound fur Peekskill, Ned Brampton and S. Wayne, cap'ns, crew and cooks, all in one."

"An imposing array, surely."

"In brief," put in Ned, "we, being poor, are rafting our worldly effects down the river as a means of saving money. We tied up at the island to-night, and thought we were so far out of the channel that we would not do harm to any one."

"Don't reproach yourselves, boys," Fordrest genially answered. "All was due to lack and the darkness, and the chief blame rests with me. 'Let the Dancing Dervish fly!' was the order I gave Twombly, captain of my craft; and he obeyed. The Dancing Dervish won't dance any more just now, but I can bear the loss. In the morn'ing we will see just what the damage is. No; I don't blame you, and how can I? I'm told that one of you assisted in saving my daughter, Caslina, when she recklessly tumbled overboard."

"It was Sol!" Ned explained, hastily.

"Young Sol, I thank you heartily," Fordrest declared. "Let that suffice for now, but I'll speak of it again to-morrow."

"That's all right, sir."

"We'll make it all right. Now, I know where we are; it is several miles to the nearest station on the Central, and there would be a long wait for a train, probably. Is there a chance for us to sleep here?"

"Plenty of it," Ned answered quickly.

"Then I will ask you to accommodate me, my daughter and her maid."

"We shall be glad to, sir."

"Captain Twombly, take a look at the Dancing Dervish, and see if you can arrive at an estimate of the damage she has sustained."

The sailor hastened to obey, while Sol, seeing that the rescued girl, or Caslina, Fordrest, as her name seemed to be, was shivering, suggested that she retire to the Flying Fish's cabin and make herself as comfortable as possible.

This aroused Caslina's father, who hastened to apologize to his daughter for forgetting her comfort. Learning that no female apparel was to be had aboard the raft, he sent a man to the Dancing Dervish to see if any of Caslina's garments, there, remained dry.

It was found, after wading in water, that what was needed, having been hung up, was free from any sprinkling of river moisture, and, equipped with these, Caslina and her maid, Anna Joy, retired to the cabin of the raft.

Fordrest and Twombly consulted again, and it was decided to send the latter, and all of the sailors except one, on to New York to bring up another boat which Fordrest owned, with capable workmen, who could put the Dancing Dervish to rights again.

This programme was carried out; the captain and crew went shoreward by way of the island, and the sole tenants of the Flying Fish became Sol, Ned, Fordrest, his daughter and her maid, and a sailor named Jim Nixon.

All these persons gathered in the cabin except Nixon, who declined to enter, averring that it was not his place.

Edmund Fordrest proved to be a friendly, jovial man, and, despite their previous ill luck in acting the part of Samaritans, both the young raftsmen made him welcome, acted the part of courteous hosts, and did all they could to help him. They were positive that kindness to him would not be misplaced, as in Jimmy Flocton's case.

Caslina was an interesting young lady of twenty, who had a fair share of beauty. Diamonds glistened in her ears, and all things went to indicate that the Fordrests were well supplied with worldly goods and means.

Edmund was still curious in regard to the raft and its owners, and Ned gave a full history of the case, omitting nothing except what concerned their late lawless guests. Of them and the double attack on the raft he said nothing.

Mr. Fordrest became a hearty sympathizer. He saw that the idea of the raft was born of boyish love for novelty, romance and adventure rather than what was practical, but he admired the ingenuity with which it had been carried out thus far.

"I'll see you on your way again," he promised, "and you shall lose nothing by harboring us."

"Don't mention it!" Ned requested.

"Are you sure your craft is all right?"

"I think it is."

"It ought to stand a collision."

"Seemed as ef 'twas going all ter smash when the kerlision came," Sol admitted, "an' I ain't sure we be all right. Can't be much hurt, though."

"If injured, I'll see you made right. I take all blame for the accident."

All finally lay down and secured a little sleep, but the night was about over.

When Sol awoke he saw the sun first of all, shining from a clear sky: a very gratifying change from the clouds which had lately prevailed.

The whole party was soon astir, and preparations were made for breakfast. Jim Nixon, in the mean while, looked to the Dancing Dervish, and found that, though helpless in her present condition, she could be repaired without much trouble or expense. She still lay in shallow water by the side of the raft.

After breakfast attention was given to the Flying Fish, and it proved that the latter was injured far more than had been thought.

The collision had been just right to cause damage, and the steering apparatus was broken, and the end of the raft so disarranged that a part of the cargo was in danger.

"Here's a big job!" Sol confessed.

"Have you tools to fix it?" Fordrest asked, anxiously.

"Yes."

"Then you can count on Nixon and me to help."

"But it may take all day."

"Never mind. I'm bound to wait for my relief boat, somewhere around here, and why not make myself useful? Bring out your hammers, and other tools, and we'll turn to and fix the Flying Fish fit for wing-work again!"

CHAPTER VII.

FOUND IN THE CABIN.

THE work began. Fordrest showed some skill as a carpenter, but Jim Nixon was useless. Being a sailor and nothing more, he could not even drive a nail accurately, and he was allowed for some time to sit in idleness.

Later, use was found for him.

It was found that much of the cargo must be shifted to get at the injury, and here Jim came in useful. He moved the goods uncomplainingly, some having to be carried to the island.

Noon found the repairs only half completed.

"We sha'n't get in motion to-day," Sol admitted, while they were eating dinner.

"Well, there's another day coming," Ned answered.

"Yes; ef it don't git belated."

"Have patience, boys, and you'll be all right. One might lie here a week and not mind it; the place is pleasant, peaceful and safe."

So decided Fordrest, but the raftsmen were not wholly of his opinion. They remembered Flocton and Eliza, and wondered where those strange persons were. Jimmy had left with threats upon his lips. Would he carry them out? Was he still near? Was he watching them from ambush? Would he, when night came, again reinforced, perhaps, by men as evil as himself, make another attack?

Such possibilities were not pleasant to dwell upon, and the navigators would have been more pleased if the Flying Fish had been hourly drifting nearer her destination.

As the party arose after eating, Caslina chanced to disarrange the piece of carpeting which lay loosely upon the floor, and this brought to light something which she first looked at in surprise, and then bent and picked up.

"A bracelet!" Fordrest observed. "I did not know, young men, that you carried jewelry."

"It don't belong to me," replied Ned.

"Nor ter me—hardly!" Sol added.

"Didn't you drop it, miss?" Ned continued, addressing Caslina.

The latter did not answer; she was looking at the bracelet with strange intentness, and it was to be seen that her color changed.

Fordrest noticed that it was but a cheap affair, and he jovially asked:

"Do you claim it, Cassie?"

"Father," she cried, "did you ever see this bracelet?"

"I? No."

"But you have. Look at it carefully!"

"Don't expect me to recognize such a vanity and empty trifle."

"Father, it was Sarah Stoltz's!"

"What?" cried Fordrest, sharply.

"I've seen Sarah wear it many a time."

He snatched the bracelet away, and regarded it with dilated eyes.

"Useless!" he finally commented; "I never could remember such things. But, child, you

surely are mistaken. How could her bracelet come here?"

Caslina turned a doubtful gaze upon Ned and Saltpeter Sol.

"Perhaps these boys can explain," she remarked.

"Ef it was here afore you, I should say 'twas left by one Eliza Burch, ter wit, namely," Sol replied.

"Who is she?"

"Now you've got me!"

"Boy, if Caslina is right, we must know all about this matter!" declared Fordrest, with stern emphasis very unlike his late kindness.

"Hev we refused any information? Mebbe you think we've got somethin' ter conceal?"

"Pardon me, my young friend; I meant no harm. But pray tell me all!"

"We've had other passengers sence we set sail in this man-o'-war; a male an' a female; an' the male was a 'tarnal snake with p'izon on top all around his fangs. He smote me, an' we had it hip an' thigh, an' all the rest o' the j'int an' muscles; but we driv him out o' the sanctum, an' now he's conspicuous by his absence as 'twere."

"I don't understand."

Sol was bracing himself for another effort, but Ned Brampton came into the case and took the burden of explanation upon himself. He told the story well, and both Fordrest and his daughter listened with rapt attention. Several times they interrupted with questions, and manifestly, they grew more excited as the story went on.

"Describe this Eliza!" ordered Fordrest, as Ned paused.

The youth managed to give a fairly good description.

"By my life! I believe it was she!" the questioner declared.

"How else should the bracelet be here?" asked Caslina, quickly.

"True, true."

"Father, after our long hunting we have, at last, almost encountered her!"

"Why didn't we arrive sooner?"

"But the man—who can he be?"

"I don't know, but of this rest assured: Eliza Burch and Sarah Stoltz are one and the same person."

"And she has escaped us!"

"No, no! We are on her trail, and she shall be hunted down. I'll go to the nearest village, and telegraph our detective in New York."

"It seems she is still in evil work."

"Why not? One like her would do anything."

The speaker's gaze wandered, and then rested upon Sol. He sighed and added:

"Of course you are wondering at our strange talk, and I will explain what it means. Nearly a year ago a servant-girl who gave the name of Sarah Stoltz entered our home, having been engaged to care for my two-year-old grandson, Joseph Fordrest, only child of my deceased son, Joseph, senior. She was a fair-appearing girl, but, to be brief, she stole my grandson and disappeared. Since then I have hunted far and wide, had many detectives on the track, and spent thousands of dollars to find the child, but you have given us the first clew. The description of the girl, together with the bracelet, makes me almost positive that it was Sarah who came here."

"She's got a partner worse than her, fur while she was right downcast, now an' then, Flocton was as flippy as you please."

"Sarah was often downcast and gloomy at our house," added Caslina.

"Very likely, this Flocton was then, as now, her evil genius, and led her to steal Joseph," suggested Mr. Fordrest.

"They must be captured, father."

"True, true; I'll go and telegraph, immediately. Boys, I'll leave Nixon to help you, but I must be excused."

"Sartain, sartain!" Sol agreed, heartily.

Fordrest acted upon his plan and departed at once; then, when the excitement had worn off somewhat, the raftsmen and Nixon resumed work.

All the afternoon it went on. By five o'clock the Flying Fish was in as good condition as ever, and ready for progress, but the rearranging of the cargo took up so much time that, when it was done, it was decided not to start until the next morning. Fordrest had returned, and, as there was no sign of Captain Twombly, the former was unwilling to leave the place.

Again night fell.

The little party were far from being contented, and Fordrest was no longer the jovial companion he had been. His troubles had been brought back afresh, and he and Caslina were in

a thoughtful, nervous mood. Nixon gave most of his time to smoking, and Sol and Ned were left to amuse themselves as best they could.

"Wonder ef we're ter hev a fracas ter-night?" Sol asked, meditatively.

"Probably not," Ned returned.

"How about the last two?"

"This ought to be 'three times and out,'"

"It may be—fur us. Tell ye what, I hope I ain't a coward, but I don't forgit the way Jimmy Pirate Kidd looked an' acted. He said he'd see us ag'in, an' I tell ye he's *bad* all the way through!"

"We've got force enough to fix him, now."

"Yes; ef he comes alone."

"I won't oppose your idea, Sol, for I feel a bit uneasy, but I hope when he gets away he will think we ain't worth noticing."

"You forgit the mysterious somethin' he tried ter find."

"Can that have been the bracelet?"

"Great Scott! no; Eliza wa'n't up on top the cargo; the bracelet couldn't 'a' slipped through the canvas ef she had been; an', besides, Jimmy Pirate's way showed he was huntin' fur some bigger article."

"What could it have been?"

"Give it up!"

"And I've got nothing valuable, to tempt any one."

"Don't puzzle yer brains, my frien', fur it won't do no good," Sol declared. "We hev run up ag'in a mystery with three rows o' teeth, claws an' inch long, hoofs like gunboats, an' wings like a circus-tent; but we can't grapple with it. Leave it ter time, an' Jimmy Outlaw may step around an' enlighten us!"

It was time to retire, and this matter was duly considered. No guard would have been set, owing to their numbers, had not Fordrest had a hope that Sarah Stoltz would put her head into a noose; but, as it was, Nixon was left on duty to watch.

The others retired and were soon asleep.

An hour later Nixon, weary and none too zealous, followed their example and went to the land of Nod.

The raft was unguarded.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE THIRD ATTACK.

A GRATING among the pebbles on the island; a shaking of the bushes; a head raised above the rocks furtively; a pair of unfriendly eyes bent upon the raft.

A spy was there, and he boded no good to the raftsmen.

After a long look he turned and seemed to whisper to some one, and then left his covert. On his hands and knees he crept toward the Flying Fish, using great caution.

Although so prudent he felt sure that sleep had claimed every one there, and his eyes glistened with mixed, but unworthy, feelings.

A little further and he came to a sudden stop.

He had discovered Nixon.

The sailor reclined in such a position that, while his form was easy to be seen, his face was in no degree visible. The skulker eyed him for some time, looked the other parts of the raft over, and then turned and crept back as he had come.

Within the bushes he encountered two other men.

"All hunk!" was his expressive comment.

"They're sound asleep."

"No chance ter fight, then," grumbled a second man.

"Perhaps they will accommodate you."

"Hope so."

"Jones is never happy except when fightin'."

"He don't want to kick up a row here."

"I'll lick the man who makes a row!" declared Jones.

"Be still, now! I have discovered one of the kids on deck, fast asleep. The other is probably in the cabin. Be that as it may, our course is plain; we go there, pounce on the youngsters, hush their gurgles, and tie them up. No use of hurting them, I dare say—and I've promised not to. Then we search the cargo for a certain thing I want—"

"And we get a 'tenner,' each, whether you find your article or not?"

"So I promised; so I'll do."

"Good! For the blessed 'sawbucks' we would foller you down ter the grit an' gravel o' the river-bed. Lead on, Jimmy; lead on!"

"Hush! Not so loud!"

"Then show us the way."

The leader turned; the three left the bushes; they advanced toward the raft, Nixon slept on. No human eye saw the skulkers.

They reached the Flying Fish and crept upon the lower deck. Fixing their gaze upon Nixon, they crawled toward him.

Perhaps they made more noise than they thought they did, for the sailor suddenly stirred and lifted his head from the side of the upper deck, against which he leaned. The prowlers dropped down and lay like things without life. Nixon yawned, but, sublimely unconscious of danger, did not look around. He took a pipe from his pocket and, finding it half-filled, lighted it without a suspicion that if he had chanced to thrust out his feet he might have struck either one of three men.

They lay beside his knees like sleeping dogs, screened by the darkness and his carelessness.

"This keepin' watch is tough!" commented Nixon, speaking aloud. "I wouldn't go ter sleep fur the world, but I must say a night-watchman deserves extra pay—especially ef he's vigilant. Especially ef he is *vigilant!*" repeated the disciple of faithfulness, with emphasis. "Some folks would sleep on watch, but I won't! No, I won't! Why won't I? Because I won't—won't—won't—"

His voice stopped. His head sunk low again, and only the faint drawing of the pipe told that he was awake. And, really, he was two-thirds asleep.

The prowlers were not disposed to wait longer. The guard must be aroused sooner or later; the sooner, the better.

Jimmy arose and suddenly seized Nixon by the throat, bore him over back and planted his knee on the fallen man's breast.

"Be still, or you're a dead man!" he growled.

The sailor remained quiet, but more because he was utterly amazed than for any other reason. He was not clear-headed, yet, and could not realize the full extent of the situation.

Jimmy's helpers knew what was expected of them, and Nixon's hands and feet were quickly bound. When a gag had been added, the sailor was helpless.

"Leave him here!" whispered the leader. "I don't know who he can be, but probably he's some man they've hired as a guard; there can't be any more outsiders. Now, I reckon we'll find the kids in the cabin. Follow me!"

He led the way with the readiness of one accustomed to the place, and then paused at the door of the cabin. All was dark there, but he could hear the sound of regular breathing.

Turning, he nodded to his men, made a gesture to enjoin silence, and next slowly descended the steps.

After some hesitation he located the position of two sleepers and placed his men properly; then the prowlers pounced upon their prey. Jimmy had been sure that they were Sol and Ned, and the result astonished him.

First of all a shrill scream arose in a feminine voice, and then a deep masculine roar—sounds which, plainly, were never produced by boyish throats and lungs.

"Ho! robbers, robbers!" shouted Edmund Fordrest. "Help, here, help!"

This time it was the interlopers' turn to be dumfounded; they had looked only for weak boys, and a full-grown man and a screaming woman were not in their line. Surprise put them off their guard, and, in a moment more, Fordrest was upon his feet and showering lusty blows upon them.

The cabin became a mixture of menagerie and Babel, cries in every key mingling with the sound of blows and struggling.

As soon as the prowlers realized the situation they evinced a desire to escape, not knowing how much of a force they had to confront, but Fordrest clung to one of their number, the others fell over each other in their eagerness to leave, and then, to cap the climax of their woes, when they did reach the door, they met Sol and Ned.

The raftsmen had been sleeping outside, but, being aroused, were ready to aid their guests.

They attacked the interlopers, and the fight waxed warm.

How it would have ended is uncertain had not Caslina fled from the cabin in alarm and, almost falling over Nixon, realized the situation and set him free.

Then the sailor, stirred to the depths with wrath by his treatment, hurried to join his friends. His strong arms made a vast difference, and turned the tide of battle. Finally, one of the outlaws succeeded in getting out of the cabin and, running to the edge of the raft, plunged into the river and swam toward the western bank.

About the same time a light flashed up in the cabin. Caslina, having recovered her courage,

had returned there and attended to this important matter.

A singular scene was revealed.

Two of the intruders were prisoners.

Nixon had taken one unaided; he had his man flat on his face and stomach; and Nixon sitting astride of his back, held him down.

The second captive was quite as securely held; Fordrest, Sol and Ned each had hold of him.

Nixon laughed aloud.

"Here's yer nice fat calves, all ready fur market! Here's veal, all dressed but tannin' it, an' a rod o' correction wal laid on, forty less one, will do the tannin'. Shiver my timbers!"

Fordrest turned their prisoner over.

"Jimmy Flocton!" Sol cried.

"What?" demanded Fordrest.

"He's the man we tol' ye about."

A look of joy came to Fordrest's face.

"By my life!" he murmured, "luck has changed!"

"Let me go!" growled Flocton.

"Yes; we will *not!*" Sol retorted.

"You young cur! how dare you touch me?"

"Shall I ketch the itch?" demanded the raftsmen, readily.

"Let me go, I say, or I'll—"

"Silence, dog!" Fordrest interrupted.

"And who be you?"

"Your master!"

"No man is my master," Jimmy raved, "and I'll do mischief to ye if you don't let me go! By what right am I thus pounced upon?"

"By what right do ye sneak in here?" cried Sol.

"None of your business, boy!"

"I'll make it my biz, aged sir!"

"Enough of idle talk," interrupted Fordrest.

"Know you, men, that you are prisoners. You might as well protest against the reign of day and night as to argue with us. Taken in the act of violence, we shall hold you by the right of might. Caslina!"

"Sir?"

"Bring my revolver!"

The girl obeyed.

Despite the last notification both Jimmy and his partner in iniquity failed to accept the situation meekly. They raved, threatened and pleaded, but all in vain. Now that Fordrest knew who Flocton was, he would not have released him under any condition. Eager to learn the fate of his kidnapped grandson, he was impatient to question the supposed ally of Sarah Stoltz. So, in defiance of their anger, the two ruffians were securely bound.

"Now for business!" Fordrest added.

CHAPTER IX.

OFF ON A DANGEROUS TRIP.

THE prisoners were propped up in one corner. An examination had shown that no damage had been done, and no signs of other men were to be seen. It was correctly inferred, therefore, that Jimmy's fresh attack had been repelled with great success, and his plans put to defiance and ruin.

He was a very angry-looking man as he faced his captors. From his point of view he had cause to be. Three times he had tried to accomplish a certain purpose, and, every time, signal failure had been his only reward.

As a result, his anger burned warmer and warmer, and his malevolent hatred of Sol and Ned had no bounds.

"What's your name?" Fordrest abruptly asked.

"Find out, if you can!" growled the prisoner.

"You have claimed the name of Jimmy Flocton. Is it your real name?"

"That's my business."

"Gently! You will lose nothing by being frank with me."

"I've got nothing to say."

"Do you know a girl named Sarah Stoltz?"

Jimmy's eyes opened widely, betraying surprise, but the tell-tale signs were soon gone.

"No," he replied sulkily.

"You know very well that she is Eliza Burch."

"Do I? Who speaks for me anyhow?"

"Be calm, sir! You will see that you are now in difficulty. You have overstepped the law enough so that you are sure of a term in prison if we press the charge. This we certainly shall do unless you alter your course, but you can gain complete liberty by complying with our wishes. Will you admit that Eliza Burch and Sarah Stoltz are the same person?"

"I never heard of Sarah Stoltz in my life!" the prisoner declared.

"And never heard of a boy, named Joseph Fordrest, being stolen by her?"

"No."

The previous speaker turned, took the bracelet from Caslina and held it up.

"How about this?"

"Never seen it before!"

"Eliza lost it here."

"Can't say."

"This clew," pursued Fordrest, with growing vigor, "connects Eliza positively with Sarah Stoltz. Now, as you are her ally, you must know what her movements have been in the past. I am the grandfather of young Joseph, and it was in my family that Sarah came to work. I am willing to compromise the case, and, if you will tell me where my grandson is, I will drop all prosecutions against you. Restore the boy, and you shall go free!"

There was a cunning gleam in Flocton's eyes. "You make a right fair offer," he answered, insincerity visible in every feature and word, "but I can't tell what I don't know. I never heard of Sarah Stoltz, and don't know of any kidnapped boy named Joseph—or any other kidnapped boy."

Fordrest was silent for several moments. Jimmy did not tell his fiction well; instead of removing the belief against him, he strengthened it.

The old gentleman grew surer of the supposition that he was on the right track.

"I'll give you time to think it over," he finally said. "To such a man as you I should say that liberty must possess more attractions than prison-life. You are not to doubt my word, for I never break it. Do what I have asked, and I will keep my promise. Now, I'll let you alone until morning. Think it over, and I believe that you will change your mind."

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll get left!"

There was insolence and bitter animosity in Flocton's manner. Saltpeter Sol went to Mr. Fordrest's side and whispered:

"Pris'ner No. Two has a greedy twinkle in his optikel eyes. I b'lieve he knows more or less, an' would peach ef he had a chance; but ef you give him a chance, be sure that it ain't done when Jimmy Pirate Kidd is around ter glower onter him."

Fordrest saw the wisdom of this advice, and was shrewd enough not to betray by word or look the plan thus outlined.

"I am not in favor of taking them to the village to-night," he observed, speaking for Flocton's ears. "We had better keep them here, and attend to the rest to-morrow. We'll take them outside. By the way, I judge we had better keep them apart, so they cannot meddle with each other's bonds. Nixon, you and I will trundle Flocton out."

Sol saw that the old gentleman had a project, and let him carry it out.

Jimmy was taken to the rear of the raft and bound to the timbers. Nixon was left as a guard, and then Fordrest returned to the cabin.

He confronted the second prisoner at once.

"What is your name, my man?"

"Tom Hill, sir," was the quick reply.

"You've been in bad company, to-night."

"You're right, sir."

"Do you know it's a State's Prison offense?"

"Yes, sir; but I hope you'll show me mercy," was the eager response.

"Do you deserve it?"

"Mebbe I can."

"How?"

"You asked Flocton some questions."

"I did. Can you answer them?"

"I b'lieve I can."

"Do it," continued Fordrest, quickly, "and I will make you a free man."

"Do you promise that?"

"I promise that if you can give me information which will lead to the recovery of my grandson I will set you at liberty. Yes, more than that; if you are disposed to lead an honest life, I will put you in the way of doing it."

"I'm afeerd thar's no good in me. I'm a man of ill luck, sir."

"We'll beat out the ill luck."

"I wish it could be so, but I'm not hopeful. But was yer grandson a little feller with blue eyes an' a big head o' curlin' yarler hair?"

"The same; the same!"

"Then you kin bet Jimmy has him. He's in charge of an ol' woman named Mother Hooper, who lives a few miles up the river; but she looks ter Jimmy an' Lize for her orders, an' they gives her the pay. I don't know whether it comes direct out o' their pockets, an' Mother Hooper don't; but they pays her. An' they've been ter her house, an' Lize is there now, or was, when we left."

"You came direct from her house?"

"Yes."

"Lead us there, then, and all my promises shall be kept, my man!"

"I'll do it, sir!"

There was much of promise in Tom Hill's manner. He looked frankly and earnestly at the questioner, and even Sol Wayne was inclined to believe all he said, as the raftsmen admitted when Fordrest consulted him.

It was decided that the trip to Mother Hooper's house should be made at once. Hill stated that the team in which he and his allies came was still waiting, unless it had been stolen; and this was not likely, for the escaped man had swum away toward the west, and the team was in the bushes on the east shore.

Sol was made happy by an invitation to accompany Fordrest and Hill, and the three left the Flying Fish, after repeated cautions to Nixon and Ned.

It was not hard to reach the mainland, and Hill then led the way to where the team had been left. It was there still—a two-seated carriage, with a pair of fine horses attached.

It was brought to the road, Hill took the driver's position, and away they went at a rapid pace.

The ride was one of almost utter silence. Saltpeter Sol could imagine, faintly, the condition of Mr. Fordrest's mind, beset as the latter was with hopes, doubts and fears, and the youth refrained from disturbing him.

As for Sol, he was led to look with wonder upon the results of the rafting scheme. When he and Ned started out they had expected a trip enlivened only by the novelty of their strange venture, but the results had been very different and unexpected.

Adventures had multiplied, and the raftsmen was young enough to enjoy the excitement thoroughly. But on the latest undertaking he looked very seriously; with Fordrest's happiness at stake, it was not to be regarded as a mere piece of enjoyment.

"We're almost there," announced Hill, at last.

Fordrest aroused with a start.

"Whom shall we meet?" he asked.

"Well, we ought ter meet nobody but Mother Hooper, but she may hev some o' her rounders thar."

"Is she a lawless woman?"

"A reg'lar out-an'-outer."

"And other men may be there, eh?"

"There's a tough gang around here, an', though it ain't no home fur them, they often drop in on Mother Hooper. She keeps whisky on the sly, an' sells ter the boys. Sometimes, sev'ral on 'em come there in a bunch an' stay awhile, drinkin' an' smokin', but it's so late in the night that the coast cught ter be clear. I hope it will," Hill slowly added.

"Would these men oppose us, if there?"

"They would set onter us like wolves, ef the ol' woman told them to."

"Then, if they are there, we may expect trouble."

"I'm afeerd so. The ol' woman won't give up the boy peaceful; we've got ter fight fur him, anyhow. Ef her gang is there, it'll be a despr'it tussle, you bet!"

CHAPTER X.

THE VULTURES OF THE OLD HOUSE.

THIS statement revealed a state of affairs upon which Fordrest had not counted.

"Have you a revolver, Hill?" he asked.

"Yes," the man replied.

"So have I. Now, we two could make quite a stand, if it comes to a fight. The question is, will you help me?"

"Gladly!"

"I think I can trust you."

"You can, sir; you can. I am a miserable wretch who has sunk low because o' ill luck an' his own weakness. I hate myself for it, but them is the facts. Your kindness has give me a grain o' manhood back, an' I'll fight my best for you!"

"Thank you, my man; thank you. I'll trust you implicitly."

The house was reached. It was a large, rambling affair, old-fashioned, weather-beaten and dilapidated.

The team was left far enough back so that the noise of wheels would not be heard, and then the three adventurers approached. No light was visible, and slumber seemed to have claimed whoever was there, but Hill confidently explained:

"A knock will bring Mother Hooper to the door. She sleeps nigh there, so she won't miss an order fur whisky, let the boys come whenever they may."

"Go on and rap! She will admit you, won't she?"

"Yes."

"The boy and I will keep a little back, and be ready to follow you in."

This plan was put in execution, and Tom knocked heavily on the door.

Saltpeter Sol was in a state of suspense and excitement. There was a charm about the venture, though he devoutly hoped there would be no fighting. He was not armed in any way, and no one appeared to think it necessary that he should be, but he picked up a stout stick about two feet long, and concealed it under his coat.

If he was going into a skirmish, he did not want to be helpless.

Three times Hill knocked, and then there was a stir inside. A slide in a panel of the door was opened.

"Who's there?" asked a wheezy, female voice.

"Tom Hill."

"What d'ye want!"

"Whisky an' terbacco, with a chance fur a light."

"Where's Jimmy an' Cale?"

"Gone over to Snow's."

Mother Hooper appeared to be satisfied, and she opened the door. Hill entered, and Fordrest followed close after him. When the old woman saw the second man she made a movement to close the door, but he stopped it with his foot.

"Who be you?" she demanded, suspiciously.

"A friend o' mine," explained Hill.

"But is he a friend o' mine?" was the quick retort.

"I've come to give you a chance to make money, madam," Fordrest stated, persuasively.

Mother Hooper's face, dimly visible, did not bear evidence that she was convinced, but, as he was already inside the door, she was shrewd enough to make the best of the situation.

"Come in!" she directed, ill-naturedly.

She turned, struck a match and lighted a kerosene lamp. A large, dirty kitchen was revealed. The old woman was the only strange occupant, and she was a curiosity in her way. She was bony and muscular; her gray hair was a matted forest; her dress, reaching only half-way below her knees, was shapeless, ragged and soiled. Moreover, her breath smelled of whisky and onions, and, mingled with an unpleasant odor from the kitchen, made a whole which was obnoxious to an extreme.

Her deep-sunken eyes were turned upon Mr. Fordrest with unabated suspicion.

"What is it?" she asked, curtly.

"Do you want to earn twenty dollars?"

"Yes, ef I can honestly!"

Sol could hardly repress a smile.

"You shall see," Fordrest proceeded. "You have, as a boarder here, a young boy—"

"I have?"

Anger, fresh suspicion and hostility flashed into the woman's evil eyes, and the words were as sharp as the thrust of a sword.

"No, I have not!" she added, with emphasis.

"I ain't got no boarders, an' no boy is here. Boys! Pah! I hate 'em! Noisy, sassy meddlers!"

She turned her gaze upon Sol at this point, as if to let him know that he came in under the same head, but the raftsmen bore the charge philosophically.

"I have the word of Hill, here, that the boy is in yonder house," persisted Fordrest.

Mother Hooper shook a bony fist near Tom's face.

"You unmitigated liar!" she cried. "You unconsciousable thief! You phenomigal scoundrell! You—"

"How about my money?" interrupted Fordrest.

"Counterfeit!" she snapped.

"It is good, and I'll pay you well—"

"No you won't!"

"About the boy—"

"There ain't no boy here, an' ain't been. It's all a lie of that perfidulous wretch there!"

"I'll give you a good sum, cash, to come to terms. If I pay more than the other parties, can't you be induced to listen to reason—"

"No; I won't listen! You're a malevolent scoundrel, an's do you get out o' my house. Start!"

"This talk has gone far enough!" declared the old gentleman, sternly. "Now, hear me! The boy is here as I have said, and, if you don't produce him, I will have you arrested!"

"Aha! so you threaten me?"

"I do; and what I threaten shall be done. Take you notice. Shall we arrest you, or not?"

"I'd like to see you!" was the scornful, sneering response. "What! you arrest me? Why,

you poor, insignificant critter, you ain't a flea bite alongside o' me!"

"Idle talk will do you no good. We are going to search this house—"

"Where's your warrant?"

"We don't need any. When any person descends to infamy equal to yours, she forfeits all claim to forbearance. I am going to search this house!"

Mother Hooper shook like a leaf; she flung out her long arms; her face twitched and contracted. Fordrest thought that she was going to have a fit, but it was a spasm of rage, only. He had never before seen such a depraved, Hecate-like woman.

Slowly she turned her eyes upon Hill.

"Be you with his nibs in this?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Hill, uneasily.

"Then you'll get your medicine!"

One of the wretched woman's hands had been kept partially behind her. It now came out into view, revealing in its grasp an iron bar, and she sprung toward Hill with the weapon uplifted for a blow.

Fordrest was taken by surprise and could not move soon enough to help his ally, but poor Hill knew Mother Hooper's way so well of old that he was on his guard. Not daring to face her, he dodged alertly and ran across the room, but she pursued and gained on him at every step. His life was in danger, for he made no motion to draw his revolver, but aid was not lacking.

Bewildered as Saltpeter was, he realized that something must be done. He took the measure that first occurred to him, and thrust out his foot in the old woman's path.

She stumbled over it, and fell to the floor with force that made the rickety old house shake.

Then her reign was over. Fordrest seized her, Hill came to his assistance, and she struggled in vain. One thing she could do, and did: she screamed with that ungovernable rage that seemed so natural to her.

"That rope, boy!" gasped Hill. "Give it here, quick!"

The rope hung on a peg. Sol flung it to Hill, and the latter unceremoniously bound Mother Hooper's hands and feet. He breathed a sigh of relief when it was done.

"I was afeared some o' the men was here, an' would pounce on us," he confessed, "but it seems they ain't. Thank heavens fur that!"

"Oh! you traitor!" hissed the woman, "you ain't out o' this yet. My lads will hev you, an', when they git you, you will git done up!"

Fordrest ignored her and her threats.

"Stand guard, Hill," he directed, "and I'll search the house."

"Go up-stairs, sir," Hill advised. "There's nothin' below."

Fordrest lighted a second lamp, and then, catching Sol's wishful gaze, nodded permission to the raftsmen to accompany him. This Sol did eagerly. The old gentleman led the way with the lamp in one hand and a revolver in the other.

Reaching the head of the stairs they saw a ghostly, unfinished, rambling room before them, with boxes and barrels stowed in various places; but several doors opened off of it, and light shining from under one of them gave a clew.

The searcher was not in a moderate mood, and he opened the door without ceremony. When he had done so he was a little abashed. Only one person was in the place, and that was a woman who reclined on the bed. She was clothed in a way which suggested that she might be a descendant of the Joseph who had a coat of many colors, for her dress had been patched in various shades, though very ragged at that.

She put out her hand imploringly.

"Don't kill me!" she gasped.

"Kill you! I have no intention of doing so; rest easy. Where is the boy?"

The woman shrunk back.

"Oh! I dare not tell you!" she exclaimed.

"Indeed I dare not!"

CHAPTER XI.

SOL GOES INTO DANGER.

"TELL me, for I will protect you," declared Fordrest.

"But I dare not!" the woman reiterated.

"Why not?"

"My sister would kill me!"

"Who is she?"

"Mrs. Hooper."

"Is it possible?"

There was wonderment in Fordrest's voice, for there was little resemblance between the two women. This one was an invalid, wasted with sickness, but, despite her rags, neat and

clean. Her face, too, was far from hard and cruel; perhaps she had been refined by suffering, as metals are refined.

Fordrest rallied and assumed a strategic course.

"Do you know the boy's name?" he asked.

"It is Joseph. I don't know his last name—"

She stopped short.

"What more?" Fordrest asked.

"I can tell no more; I have told too much already. My sister would kill me if she knew I had betrayed his name."

"At least, tell me what room he is in. I am going to search the house, anyway, and you can do no harm by expediting the work."

"You have missed him!" she exclaimed.

"Missed him?"

"Yes."

"How? Where?"

"While you talked below with Mrs. Hooper—fought with her, I judge!" the speaker added, with a sigh—"the boy was taken away hurriedly."

"By whom?"

"Ross Brown and a girl named Eliza."

"That woman, again! May her sins recoil upon her own head!"

"Don't blame her, sir! She helped Brown take the boy away, but it was because she dared not do otherwise; she was in fear of her life. Oh! don't blame Eliza too much—"

"She stole my grandson!"

"I know she did, but you don't know how she was situated; she is a most unfortunate girl. She has been in evil company, and has been led on to do things she loathed. She was Jimmy's wife, and she yielded obedience. Since I've known her I've talked with her, and she is eager to leave her life of wrong-doing, even if it costs her her life. She went with Ross Brown, but it was with tears and imploring words, and menaced by his revolver. I believe she would have faced death only that she knew Brown would take the boy, anyway, and she wanted to be with him, to protect him."

"Where did they go?"

"I don't know. Brown must have been fearful of an attack, for he was ready to go on a moment's notice, and he hustled the boy and Eliza away as soon as the noise began."

"Away from the house?"

"Yes."

"Who is here now?"

"Only Mrs. Hooper and I."

"Thank you very kindly for your information, madam; I may be able to reward you, some time."

Fordrest, followed by Sol, abruptly left the room. While remembering that there was a chance that he might be deceived, he was of the opinion that the sick woman had told the truth.

If this was so it was a severe blow; he had had his grandson almost in his grasp, and had lost him. He wondered at his blindness in neglecting to set a guard outside the house.

"We will search the house, and then pursue," he said, to Saltpeter Sol, in a concentrated voice.

"Come on!"

The raftsmen was in a state of eagerness, and as much interested as if the affair had been his own. He opened the next door, but the room had no tenant. No one was found anywhere on the second floor.

They descended to the kitchen, and found Hill watching Mother Hooper wearily. The old woman turned a questioning, anxious gaze upon Fordrest's face, and then, reading it well, burst into a mocking laugh.

"Are you happy now, old times rock?" she sneered.

Fordrest ignored her, but motioned to Hill, and the trio went to the next room.

"Is the woman up-stairs reliable?" the old gentleman asked.

"Prob'ly so; I'm pretty sure so; but she's too sick ter be questioned," Hill responded.

"Indeed! Then excitement must have given her sudden, fictitious strength, for I've talked with her. She says the boy has been taken away by Eliza and a man named Ross Brown."

"And a big knave he is, sir."

"They've just fled in haste. Where would they be likely to go? Think carefully!"

"To Brown's house, no doubt."

"Then we will go there. First, let us search the lower half of the house."

This was done, but no one was found; then, after scouting a little to make sure that the kidnappers were not lurking near, Fordrest, Hill and Sol re-entered the carriage and started for Brown's.

The chase was fascinating to the raftsmen,

but he delicately forbore making any comments which would seem trivial. He knew that his leader was greatly affected, as was natural.

Hope and fear struggled together, and the latter was aided by the painful vexation of having been so near victory only to have everything lost by an oversight.

Brown's house was only a short distance away. When they arrived they found it unlighted and silent, but this was not surprising. Sol was sent to the rear, with directions to watch for attempted escapes there, and then Fordrest proceeded to the door.

Sol, from his post, heard the knocking plainly and, finally, the opening of the door.

Then came a lull; whatever was said, the voices were too low to be audible at the rear of the house.

The raftsmen had taken his position by a tree, so that no prying eyes from the house would rest upon his figure. Back of him was an extension wood which, however it might be in the daytime, was dark and gloomy now. His attention was soon called to it particularly.

There was a crackling of dry sticks as if under the pressure of feet, and he turned his head. It might mean something; it might mean nothing. A man could have caused it; so could a cow, a horse or a sheep.

But Sol soon decided that it was not caused by a domesticated animal.

Out from the shadow of the wood came a human figure. It advanced with long, yet light steps, until he could see that it was a man. The stranger came up within thirty feet of the raftsmen, but saw nothing of him. His gaze was fixed upon the house intently.

"I reckon the coast is clear, but I won't be reckless," he muttered, and then went on as before.

A suspicion flashed upon Saltpeter Sol. Was this man Ross Brown, returning to his home? If so, where was little Joseph?—where, unless he had been left in the wood?

This suspicion was too attractive not to be investigated, and he resolved to run the risk of leaving his post. This he did, and was soon among the trees.

Once there, the darkness discouraged him a good deal. The lost Joseph was only three years old, and a dozen boys of that age might have been near him and yet invisible.

He decided to act boldly, and did so.

"Joseph!" he called, in a low voice.

There was no answer; all remained silent.

"Joseph!"

He spoke louder this time, but without result. He took a few steps, and then paused in irresolution. Perhaps he was ruining his leader's chances of success by deserting the post where he had been placed.

"I'll give it a last try," he thought, and then go back. *Joseph Fordrest!*

The bushes crackled off toward his left, and then a half-stifled cry sounded; a child's cry for help.

Sol ran in that direction.

"Where be you?" he demanded, excitedly.

He was trying to locate the exact spot of the cry, as he paused again, a tall, massive figure rose near him, and then the raftsmen received a blow which felled him to the ground.

CHAPTER XII.

SOL HANGS ON STUBBORNLY.

"LAY there, meddlin' fool!" uttered a voice, in hoarse anger; and then he who had dealt Saltpeter Sol the blow turned away.

The raftsmen was floundering on the ground. He had been struck with a club, and the force of the stroke half-stunned him. He tried to rise, but seemed to have lost certain necessary powers.

He could move, but not regain his feet.

He heard and saw his assailant making off; saw him bend for a moment and snatch up an object which, obviously, was a child; and then, once more, came a boy's frightened cry.

It spurred Sol into new activity. He managed to regain his feet, but reeled dizzily and would have fallen only for the support of a tree. He saw the unknown still in retreat, and forced himself to pursue, but his head was not yet clear; he staggered as he went.

His feet splashed in a brook, and he had a creditable idea. He bent, dipped his head in the water and arose refreshed. His mind was clearer, and the dizziness gone.

All sounds had not died away, and he began to pursue with vigor. He knew he was gaining, but when he paused to listen, later nothing was

to be heard. The pursued had been shrewd enough to hide, and wait for Sol to lose him.

When the latter realized this he adopted the plan of beating up the bushes, but without success. He could not find or hear the unknown, and it became evident that the latter had used due care and made his escape.

"An' I'm all the cause of it!" muttered Sol, unjustly reproaching himself. "Why didn't I go fur help at once?—but that'd only given him better chance to escape. Anyhow, I'll go, now!"

He hurried away and tramped on until an uneasy feeling came over him.

"Why, I've gone more than fur enough ter get back! Where's the house? Have I gone wrong?"

So it seemed, and he looked up and around in a vain attempt to discover the points of compass. He was completely lost. Annoyed by this continued ill luck he shifted his course to what seemed right, and then resumed his progress.

Ill luck still attended him, and he was about to give up in despair when the woods suddenly faded away before him, he came out into open land, and saw a wide sheet of water before him.

He was on the bank of the Hudson.

"Wal, this is a p'izon shame!" he lamented. "Here I've not only lost myself ter my allies, but I've had a clew ter young Joseph an' not been able ter hold it. This ere night must be ruled by a malevolent planet, fur it's full o' triberlation. 'Tis, by sixty! Wal, wot be I goin' ter do now? I've got the lay o' land an' kin start back ter Brown's, but wot good would it do? The sarcus is all over there, an' ef I went back I might find 'em gone—or I might git lost ag'in. Shall I go back, or not?"

While considering this point he was looking out over the river. Dark as the wood had been, it was fairly light upon the stream.

Thus it was that, while he stood in irresolution, he heard the sound of oars and looked for the cause with some hope of success.

"It's comin' down the river; mebbe I kin git a ride down ter the Flyin' Fish—"

He stopped speaking as the boat appeared to his view. It was several fathoms from shore, but was being rowed in a slow, halting way, as if the oarsman was not familiar with his task.

"Only one man in it; so thar's plenty o' room fur me. Hullo! what's that? B'jinks! I b'lieve that 'tis a boy!"

Freshly excited, the raftsman kept his gaze upon the slight figure he had discovered in the boat, and the suspicion grew upon him that he was looking at the lost Joseph.

What was to be done about it? If he called out, and the two proved to be Joseph and his captor, the former would make prompt efforts to get out of the way.

"B'jinks! I'll swim for them!"

To think was to act, in this case, and Sol cast off his coat and shoes and plunged into the water. It has been stated before that he was "almost as much at home as a fish" in the liquid element, and he started with strong, steady strokes.

Not yet was the boat fully abreast of him, and they would lack but little of meeting at a common point. Then, unless the stranger was a better oarsman than he seemed, Sol believed that he could run him down.

On came the boat, its impeller showing no suspicion.

He and Sol gradually neared each other, and, as the boat passed by, the swimmer pursued rapidly, gaining with each stroke.

He could see the smaller voyager well enough to make out that he was a small boy, and his hopes increased. So did the vigor of his strokes, and he gained until, at last, he flung up one hand and laid hold of the stern of the boat.

For the first time he began to think with prudence. He could vault into the craft, if left alone, but what good would it do him? He could not compete with the man in a struggle, and would put his own life in jeopardy without helping the boy.

He hung on and meditated, and, the longer he hung, the more he felt inclined to believe he had found his proper position. He could keep it for a long time, half-supporting himself by clinging to the boat, and, when the oarsman landed, would be ready to follow him further.

This plan he proceeded to carry out.

There was perfect silence in the camp. The man rowed on in an erratic course, now and then missing the water entirely as he made a stroke, or dipping an oar so deep that he swung the boat around greatly—in brief, rowing so like a novice that a weight greater than Sol's might have hung at the stern and he been none the wiser.

As for the young passenger, he said nothing, but, clinging fast to the seat, appeared to be a good deal alarmed by the water around him.

Sol kept his place as silently as the others.

The further they went the more cause he had for hope, for they would bring up ultimately, if they kept on, at the place where the raft was.

The hope was proved fruitless.

The boatman began to hesitate and scan the bank; then, at last, he turned and rowed toward it. Just at that point it was a barren stretch of land, but Sol hailed the change.

Finally, the stranger landed and drew up the boat so that it could not drift away.

Then, without a word, he picked his small companion up in his arms and walked away.

Sol followed as near as he dared.

"This little chap is Joseph!" he decided. "I kin see the curlin' hair his granddad tol' about, an' I don't see as there kin be any mistake. He's awful still, but I suspect this snake has skeered him inter obliviousness."

Grimly the raftsman pursued, and, as he went, he kept a sharp watch for some one to whom he could appeal for help. Their course was such that there was a faint hope of their running upon Fordrest and Hill, as the two latter returned to the raft.

On went Sol and his game, their way being across a marshy tract of land. The pursuer thought that he was using all possible care, but the man finally proved that he was equally on the alert.

Suddenly he turned and came back rapidly. Sol obeyed his first impulse and dropped down, hoping that the tall grass would hide him. He was disappointed; the man stopped beside him and roughly ordered:

"Get up!"

"I'm comfort'ble here," murmured Sol.

"Get up, I say!"

The raftsman reluctantly obeyed.

"What are you doin'?" added the stranger.

"Takin' a nap."

"You're a liar! Why do you foller me?"

"I was goin' this way."

"So I see, but why were you doggin' me?"

"Mister," responded Sol, rallying, "you labor under a most p'izon misapprehension; you do, by sixty! I've been out tryin' ter lure the funny denizens o' the aqueous realm ter engulf a curved bit o' metal in their gullets. In other words, I've been fishin'—"

"Rubbish! Why did you spy upon me?"

"Now, mister—"

"Answer!" shouted the man.

"Say, who is tellin' my story, anyhow?"

The stranger made a rush to seize the courageous raftsman. The latter leaped backward nimbly, and would have escaped had not his foot caught in the grass.

He fell, and the man seized him.

"Run, Joseph, run!" cried Sol, seeing that the small boy had been set at liberty; but, if his direction was comprehended, its object was too much dazed to obey.

"I'll fix you!" pursued Sol's enemy; and, though the latter struggled desperately, he was soon overcome.

Then the victor, with singular skill, twisted the marsh-grass into ropes and bound the raftsman's hands and feet, and finished the work by thrusting more of it into his victim's mouth as a gag.

"See what you've brought yerself to!" taunted the unknown. "Here you are, bound fast and unable to yell for help; an' as nobody comes out on this marsh, the chances be that you will starve ter death here. Serve ye right fur meddlin'!"

CHAPTER XIII.

LEFT TO HIS FATE.

SOL tried to speak, but only made a wordless gurgling.

"I hope you'll enjoy yerself!" his enemy added.

The raftsman would have given a good deal for the power of speech then.

"Still, there may not be much fun in it," continued the man, kicking his prisoner slightly.

Sol silently vowed to make "fun" for his persecutor, if he ever had a chance.

"You will live quite awhile, ef the marsh grass don't get on fire," went on the stranger.

"Of course a spark from a locomotive may fire it, in which case you would go up in smoke in short order, like well-cured bacon. Ef there is no fire, you will last some time. Did you have a good supper? I hope so, fur it will make a difference, later. As I said, nobody ever comes out here, an' ef the ravens don't feed you, you'll prob'ly be quite hungry before you starve!"

This kind of talk did the man a good deal of

good, and he chuckled gleefully over what he considered his wit.

He tried to think of more to say, but, failing, finally announced that he would leave.

He picked up the boy and walked away in the darkness.

Once more Sol was left alone, and left in a most wretched state of mind. He reproached himself unjustly. He thought that he ought to have succeeded better, when the wonder was that he had done so well. He could not hope to equal a powerless man in strength, and his perseverance had been remarkable.

Nevertheless, in spite of his good work, he was menaced with utter defeat. Joseph and his captor were receding, and there was nobody to oppose the kidnapper.

Sol, however, did not take his defeat passively. Nosooner was the abductor out of sight than he began to struggle, hoping to break his bonds of marsh grass.

It was tough and pliable, but there was hope of disarranging it, he thought.

If the raftsman had been writhing in the marsh fire of which his enemy spoke he would not have twisted about much more than he did in the moments following his first opportunity. Bringing all his strength to bear, he fought the bonds zealously, indifferent to the pain caused his wrists.

For some time it looked as if he was doomed to fail, but, after the lapse of many precious seconds, the thongs slipped suddenly.

One more wrench and his hands were loose.

He tore the gag from his mouth.

He drew his knife and cut the bonds on his ankles.

He was free, at last!

Springing to his feet, he looked in the direction the kidnapper had gone.

As he had expected, the man had disappeared.

"Now, fur a race!" muttered the indefatigable raftsman; and he started on a run as rapid as the grass would allow.

The marsh was but narrow, and he soon reached a road. The question then became, which way had the object of pursuit gone?

A broad, muddy ditch lay between the road and the grass-land, and Sol bent low and began to search for footprints. He was soon successful; he found where his enemy had taken to the road.

As the latter had come across the field in a diagonal direction, it was only fair to presume that he intended to keep on toward the south, and Sol drew a long breath and sped on down the road as fast as his young legs would carry him.

Looking eagerly for the pursued, he ran without any further attempt at method.

There was a whistle and a roar behind him, and then a railroad train passed, but he did not heed it.

Just ahead, however, was a village, and he saw the train stop. Seized with sudden fear, he made every effort to reach the station before the train left, but in vain; he saw the conductor signal, and the train began to move.

At that moment a man who carried a boy in his arms ran out of the station and leaped upon the last of the moving cars. Sol recognized both man and boy.

"Stop the train!" he tried to shout, but, robbed of breath by his hard run, it was only a wheezy call.

He reached the platform, but the train was several yards away and gaining faster than he could go. He sunk upon a trunk, panting, and the station-agent looked at him curiously.

"Missed it, didn't ye?" he made comment.

Sol did not heed him.

"Is there a telegraph-office here?" he asked.

"No!"

The raftsman was silent, but, just then a carriage rolled along, and was about to pass the station when he caught sight of its occupants. They were Mr. Fordrest and Tom Hill. He sprung toward them.

"Hold up!" he cried, huskily.

"Why, it's Sol!" exclaimed Fordrest.

"He's gone!" added the boy, excitedly.

"Who is gone?"

"Joseph!"

"What?"

"He's been took away on that train!"

"How do you know?"

"I've seen him; I tried to stop 'em, but I was too late."

"Are you sure it was my grandson?"

"Sartin sure!"

"Tell me what has happened."

It was a good deal to tell and make a short story of it, but Sol succeeded remarkably well. It was a narrative of stirring adventure, too,

and a slightly skeptical expression appeared on Hill's face, as was natural; but Fordrest did not think of entertaining doubt.

"Very likely the man was Ross Brown," he agreed. "We did not find that person at his house. Most likely, too, the other fellow whom you saw near Brown's was some ally of the latter's, sent to reconnoiter; but when you first appeared, Brown became alarmed and ran away. You say there is no telegraph office here?"

"There ain't none."

"Then we must ride to where there is."

"It's only three miles down," volunteered the station-master.

"We will go at once."

So saying, Fordrest looked thoughtfully at Sol.

"Are you particular about going?" he added.

"Not unless I kin do some good," confessed Sol, wearily.

"Then I would like to have you go back to the raft. I feel sure that, by morning, Captain Twombly and his men will be on hand to raise the Dancing Dervish."

"They ought ter be."

"Hence, it is my wish that he and Nixon, with other men, if required, take the fresh boat, my daughter and her maid, and prisoner Jimmy Flocton, and proceed to New York, leaving a force here to repair the Dervish. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then we'll carry you down to the point nearest the raft. Enter the carriage!"

A few moments later they were rolling southward at a high rate of speed.

With more time on his hands Fordrest could not but regard Sol's work and devotion with admiration, and he did not hesitate to put it in words.

"When this affair is settled, my boy, you may be sure that I shall reward you. Such efforts as yours should not be repaid with mere words, nor shall they be. Just now I can think only of my grandson, and must give all my energies and time to rescuing him. Poor child! what a world of trouble he has found this!"

"He will come out all right, you bet!" Sol declared.

"I hope so."

"I ain't got an artom o' doubt."

"Your courage is noble, and I will not let mine fall below the example set. But here we are at the point opposite the raft."

Hill halted the horses, and the raftsmen sprung out. A moment more and his friends were receding.

He watched them until they disappeared in the darkness, and then turned and walked toward the raft. He wanted no more violent exercise that night.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT A HUNGRY MAN DID.

ON reaching the Flying Fish, Sol found Nixon pacing the deck. He was the only person visible.

"Where's our messmates?" asked the raftsmen.

"Miss Caslina an' her sarvint-maid is in the cabin, an' Ned Brampton an' Jimmy Flocton is sleepin' on deck," Nixon answered.

"Ned an' Jim Pirate Kidd ain't bunkin' ter-gether, be they?"

"No."

"I thought my feller-sailer had better judgment."

Nixon took another turn across the deck, and Sol observed with some surprise that he did not inquire about Fordrest, or Fordrest's grandson. Suddenly he stopped in front of the raftsmen, squared himself away like an athlete about to engage in battle, and asked a question in a deep voice:

"Do I look like a rascal?"

"Do you? No! Do you feel like one?"

"I feel mean."

"About what?"

"I've been insulted."

"Who did it?"

"Flocton!"

"Great Scott! you don't mind that, do ye?"

"Some things kin be passed by," explained Mr. Nixon, with fresh warmth, "but thar is a limit ter human endurance. I expect folks ter think me homely, an' wantin' in brains; an' I don't mind bein' suspected o' rascality by decent folks; but when a 'tarnal skunk takes me fur a feller vulture, it's excrutiatin' tough!"

"My gentle frien'," quoth Sol, "whence is this ebullition in yer honest mind?"

"It all comes o' yer Pirate Flocton."

"Oh! What's Jimmy been up ter, now?"

"Tried ter bribe me ter turn traitor!"

"Oh! did he? S'pose he showed the cash, wharwith ter pay yer?"

"He said we could collect our pay as we went erlong. Said thar was a treasure right on this raft, among *your* goods, Solomon, that would pay us both right smart, an' he offered me first half, an' then two-thirds, an' then three-thirds—the whole on't, I mean—ter libertize him!"

This statement did not surprise Sol, but, while he would have laughed down the story of treasure had it come sooner, it now only added perplexity to the mystery developed by Flocton's strange attempt to get *something* out of their cargo.

What was it?

Was Jimmy wholly in error, or was there really something of value in the cargo, unknown to them?

"It's p'izon queer!" he commented.

"I laughed the perposal ter scorn," added honest Nixon, with dignity, "an' shall now insist on appearin' ag'in' James at his trial!"

"We'll all be thar, you bet!"

"Has he called you a rascal, and other things?"

"Ef thar's an approbrius word in the language he ain't leveled at me, I'd like ter hear it!" Nixon drew a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad I ain't alone in the racket," he replied.

Sol found himself fast growing sleepy, and he did not fight off the friendly enticer. He lay down and slept soundly until morning. When he awoke he found the sun mounting up the sky, and the sound of voices made him think that Fordrest and Hill had returned.

Such was not the case, but Captain Twombly was there with the relief-boat from New York, and a force of men to repair the Dancing Dervish.

There was no sign of the missing men.

When Sol had given the message to Twombly, it was decided that the relief-boat should start for New York without delay, taking Caslina and her maid, as Fordrest had suggested, with Jimmy Flocton as a prisoner.

Seeing that about all the actors in the recent events were to leave, Sol and Ned consulted as to their own future. The Flying Fish was ready for use, and, as they could gain nothing by lingering, it was decided that they, too, should start for their destination.

Before doing this, the boys went on shore again and looked for signs of Fordrest. They found none.

Returning, they arrived just in time to see Twombly and his party depart, and, as the relief-boat went speeding down the river, the raftsmen got their own craft under way and left the scene of so many exciting events.

Only the working on the Dancing Dervish remained, and the shore of the island did not appear natural as the Flying Fish receded.

The raftsmen looked back half-regretfully.

"We're lone navigators again Sol," observed Ned.

"Correck!"

"Wonder if we'll ever see any of that party again?"

"Mr. Fordrest said we should."

"He may forget it."

"I don't consider him bound ter give us the reward he promised, an' ain't speakin' o' that; but I guess he's a man ter keep his word, so I expect him ter show up at Peekskill, some time, an' give us a frien'ly grip o' the hand. Jee-whiz! wouldn't I like ter know how he's comin' on, huntin' fur leetle Joseph! I'm almost sorry that I'm all done with the case."

"Perhaps you're not."

"What! don't expect us ter be engaged as detectives, do ye?"

"We ran upon them by chance, before; we may do so again."

"Tain't likely," Sol returned, shaking his head. "Wal, let's attend ter navigation, Cap'n Ned."

This was done, but the trip no longer possessed the fascination that it did in its first stages. It was tame work to float down the river after the recent experiences, and they felt that the end of their venture could come none too quick.

Thus passed the forenoon, and two hours of the afternoon.

At that period a sail-boat with a single visible occupant appeared ahead of them. He had the wind in his favor, and came toward them gallantly, but, when near enough to speak, he hailed them:

"Hullo, there! How are you fixed on things ter eat?"

"We ain't hungry," Sol returned.

"I be."

"Ther's a fish right under yer boat."

"I want somethin' else. I ain't got it, ut

I've got the money ter pay for it; an' I'd like ter leave a dollar with you for the means of a good, square meal. Kin we trade?"

Sol turned to Ned.

"What do you say?"

"We can't refuse him. Even if he had no money, we couldn't afford to let him go hungry. Poor folks should give to the poor."

"Guess you're right. Messmate," to the stranger, "ef you kin board us, you kin hev the food."

"Good! I'm comin'!"

The speaker proved himself a good sailor, and soon placed his boat alongside the raft. He then sprang upon the latter, and proceeded to secure his own craft.

"I forgot my lunch," he explained, "an', being a man o' prodigious appetite, I thought I'd got ter eat my boots ter keep happy, until I saw you."

"Sorry you're so hard up."

"Be you? Then lead the way ter the pantry!"

The stranger seemed to be a jovial sort of man, and, although he had a hard-looking face, the boys did not suspect that any harm lurked behind his fair request. The raft was drifting all right, and while Ned went to the cabin Sol followed to the door.

A moment later he looked back to the boat, and was just in time to see a startling change.

In the boat lay considerable rubbish, and among other things there was a piece of canvas. And Sol was just in time to see this canvas quiver as if with life; then it was flung aside and a man emerged from under it.

He leaped lightly to the raft, and Sol was dumfounded to see his old enemy, Jimmy Flocton, there, at liberty and full of triumph.

It was hard to credit his own eyesight, for Jimmy had been taken away by Captain Twombly as a prisoner, but the arch-enemy soon gave proof that he was a creature of reality.

He came down upon the raftsmen with a bullying manner.

"I've got you, this time!" he boasted.

Sol found no words with which to answer.

"I told you all the while you were stacking up against the wrong rooster, and it may be you are beginning to believe it. You haven't got half a dozen men to back you up, now."

"I reckon I'm able ter back up myself!" Salt-peter Sol retorted.

"Oh, you're game; I'll allow that, but it's just what has got you into trouble. Boys should be seen, not heard; and you've been poking your nose into my business a good deal. Curse you! you shall repent it yet!"

His air of triumph changed to one of deadly enmity, and Sol half expected an immediate attack. Nevertheless, he did not shrink with fear.

"I'll thank you ter get off my raft!" he declared.

"Oh! you will?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I sha'n't go. This little job has been carefully, though suddenly, planned, and you are in for the war. You can't order us around, and I doubt if you ever tell tales on us."

There was marked significance in the insinuation.

"Tie a stone ter the little varmint's, an' drop 'em inter the river," suggested Jimmy's ally.

"Not much; they might escape somehow. No; our policy is to fix them so they will never be able to blow on us!"

CHAPTER XV.

A FAMILIAR VOICE STRANGELY HEARD.

SOL and Ned could not be blind to the meaning of these speeches. Even if past events had not given them a clew to the scant mercy they might expect from Jimmy Flocton, the evil looks of the men, and their words, would have told a plain story.

As Flocton had said, it was not policy to let them testify against him, and there was only one sure way of preventing it.

It involved the perpetration of a monstrous crime.

"Say what ye will," stubbornly argued Flocton's ally, "there ain't no surer way than mine. When ye bind a feller, tie a stone to him, an' drop him in the river, how is he goin' to git out an' peach?"

Salt-peter Sol rallied.

"You chaps are havin' quite an amooosin' time, ain't ye?" he retorted, his voice far steadier than was to be expected. "Now, don't you think you kin intimidate us; we ain't built that way. More than this, we order you off from our raft!"

"Oh! you do, eh?"

"I do."

"You—do?"

"Say, be you a parrot, or what's yer species? Should say ye was half-wolf, half-porker, an' three quarters dog, by the way ye yelp. Come down ter boss-sense! I know you, Mr. J. Flocton, an' don't know no good of you. We don't want you on our raft. Skip!"

"Now you've freed your mind, I'll free mine," steadily asserted Jimmy. "You know me; perhaps you don't know my friend. He's Cole Jones, the fellow who escaped and swum the river, the night your gang captured me."

"Can't say I'm honored by knowin' him."

"He's with me now, body and boots; and we're here to pay off old debts. I owe you more than I can tell of ill-will, and the hour of reckoning has come!"

He advanced upon Sol, and Jones did the same in respect to Ned.

Sol caught up a club.

"Keep off!" he ordered.

Jimmy did not obey; he sprang to close quarters, and, though he received a severe blow, seized upon the raftman. It was another thing to conquer him. The struggle seemed very unequal, but Sol was thoroughly aroused, and he fought as he had never done before.

Twice he tripped Flocton, but could not hold him; and several times he had writhed away from the seemingly unbreakable holds Jimmy gained upon him; but in the end, the outlaws were successful.

Both the young navigators were bound, and the Flying Fish was in the hands of the enemy. The latter drew their boat up on the deck, and proceeded to do away with any tell-tale signs that might arouse the suspicions of chance observers.

The boys were carried inside the cabin.

"Now for the treasure!" exclaimed Flocton, as they went out.

And they scrambled up to the upper deck.

"Ned, I hope they'll show us the 'treasure!'" Sol muttered.

"What are we to do?"

"Don't see as we kin do anything."

"Looks that way!"

"Are your bonds tight?"

"Tight! They cut like knives!"

"So do mine. I can't possibly get out of them. Sol, we can't expect help, so what are we going to do? Are we doomed?"

"Never say die, messmate! I don't b'lieve we was born ter be wound up by sech p'izon snakes, like as ef we was clocks. Nary time! We'll beat 'em out, yet!"

This cheerful view of the case was very much like Sol, but Ned Brampton knew that it was not based upon sound reasoning. The chances were very much against honest persons taking more than careless notice of the raft, and that appeared to be the prisoners' one hope.

The captors had the will to do any deed of darkness.

Flocton and Jones were heard outside the cabin. Perhaps they thought their voices were not audible inside, but, if so, they were mistaken. The raftsmen could hear all that was said.

"It's an innocent-looking thing," Jones remarked.

"That's what the kids think."

"Seems strange that it should be worth so much money. Didn't your boss play a game on ye, when he hired yer?"

"Not much!" Jimmy asserted. "Every dollar I'm to get is put up with a mutual friend, and even if any boss gets left on this racket, I get my money just the same."

"Is this concern worth nothing to the kids?"

"Well, I should say so; it's worth as much to Ned Brampton as to my boss."

"How much, d'ye s'pose?"

"Ten thousand dollars, maybe!"

Ned's eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"Whew! that's a pile o' money!" commented Jones, in surprise almost equal to Ned's. "Be you sure it ain't worth anything to us?"

"Yes."

"These boys are fools ter have handled ten thousand dollars, having it under their noses every day, an' not suspect the fact."

The speakers moved further away, and no more was audible to the prisoners, but they would have given a good deal to know what the object of conversation was. They could not believe that Flocton was talking at Jones's expense, for he had made strenuous efforts to get the article. There must be cause for it, but what had they on the raft that was of value?

Having started everything into the desired channel, Flocton and Jones kept the raft on its way in a systematic fashion, and would have

passed for honest navigators with any one except those who knew that the Flying Fish belonged to other persons.

For a long while they did not come near Sol and Ned, and the latter were left in uncertainty as to what the future had in store for them.

Ned was quite certain that Flocton would keep his threat and kill them, while Sol was more hopeful, and regarded the threats as an effort to terrify them.

Despite this alleged view of the case, neither he nor Ned could feel at ease. Flocton was evil enough to keep his word in this case, and it was only a question of whether he would run the risk of making himself a candidate for the gallows.

One more conversation was overheard which threw light on the situation.

The conspirators sat down near their former position and talked freely.

"Where d'ye s'pose old man Fordrest is now?" asked Jones.

"Rushing around hap-hazard," Jimmy answered. "He never will see his precious grandson again."

"Luck favored Brown, didn't it? Now, ef he hadn't known that repairs were bein' made on the railroad, an' that the train would hev to slack up, he wouldn't 'a' dared to take it, an' the boy, Sol, might hev run him down. That was lucky fact the first. Second, was when he jumped off the train with the kid at the place o' repairs. Third, was when Fordrest sent his telegram to hev the train searched, an' lo! Brown had already gone. Fourth, Fordrest lost all trace, an' young Joe is still in Brown's hands."

"I'm going to take charge of him, and deliver him to my boss," asserted Jimmy. "I've made a pretty penny out of the kid, but the hue and cry has got to be too hot for comfort."

"I'll bet he will get nabbed yet."

"His hope lies in the fact that nobody suspects him."

"It's queer that he should hire you, a year ago, ter kidnap the boy, an' now hire you ter steal this stuff from the raft, an' the two jobs be a branch o' the same game."

"Hush! not so loud!" cautioned Flocton. "The kids might hear you."

He arose, came to the cabin-door and looked in. There was nothing to betray the fact that Sol and Ned had heard him.

"Well, how do you like it?" he sneered.

"Boss," Sol coolly answered.

"Enjoy it while you can. We'll make port about dark, and then your case will be disposed of."

He sauntered away, leaving the prisoners in new perplexity. In what way did an attempt to rob them of a mysterious *something* connect with the abduction of Mr. Fordrest's grandson, a year before?

The riddle was too deep to be solved.

The raft drifted on until the sun set and night began to fall. The manner of the river-pirates then changed, and they acted as if they were approaching their destination. Such was the fact, for, soon after it became fully dark, they headed for the east bank.

Nearing it, the Flying Fish was run into a sort of bay, which was well concealed by an island and a cape which lay at just the right point. After this, the raft was no longer visible from the river.

The prisoners knew that something unusual was occurring, and listening attentively, heard and felt the raft brought up to land.

Then followed the sound of voices, as if the landing had been made among waiting friends.

"Kin they hev put into a village?" asked Sol.

"They wouldn't be so reckless."

"Should say not; but them other folks—"

"Hark, Sol!"

"What is it?"

"I know that voice!"

"Who is it?"

"Thomas Lake's! Yes; as sure as you live, it's that of my guardian, who ran away with my money!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CRISIS.

NED was in a state of sudden excitement, and listened eagerly for audible words outside, but some one there had become cautious. The conversation was continued in a voice so low that nothing was to be overheard.

Finally, even the murmur of voices ceased, and nothing showed that any one except themselves remained on the Flying Fish.

"Kin it be," Sol asked, thoughtfully, "that

your ex-guardian is at the bottom of all this mischief?"

"Why should he be?" Ned returned.

"Who else would be likely ter know there was vallerbles in the cargo you thought almost worthless?"

"There's something in that."

"Ef the voice you heerd was reelly Thomas Lake's, you kin put it down fur a fact that he's in the racket."

"I thought he must have gone to Canada, after robbing me."

"Did you mention his name ter Fordrest?"

"I am not sure, but I think not."

"Wal, here we be, in Jimmy Pirate Kidd's own lair, an' I don't see what's ter save us. Ef he says 'Walk the plank!' off we go in old-time pirate style. Ef he sees fit ter sink us, with a stone tied to us, ez was pleasantly suggested, I don't see ez we kin do any more than ter be recoupled ter being mermaids. I presoom we might amoose ourselves fur awhile by equintin' inter a lookin'-glass an' ccombin' our auburn tresses with a corral comb, 'cordin' ter mermaids' fashion; but I've an idee it would get p'izon monotonous, arter awhile."

Another half-hour elapsed without sounds outside, and then what little light entered the cabin by the door was suddenly shut out as some one appeared there.

The person seemed to hesitate, but the boys remained silent.

"Is any one here?" finally asked a low, tremulous voice, and it was plainly that of a woman.

"We're here!" Sol admitted.

The woman sprang down the steps.

"Speak your names!" she directed, hurriedly.

"Ned Brampton and Sol Wayne."

"Thank Heaven! you still live!"

"Say!" cried Sol, in sudden excitement, "oo you Eliza Burch?"

"Hush! not so loud! Where are you? Let me cut your bonds. It may cost me dear, but I will not see you killed!"

The last words were in a soliloquizing way, as if she spoke only to herself, but her hands were at Sol's wrists, already.

"By George! you're a trump, Eliza!" he declared.

There was no answer, but she used a knife so skillfully that both were soon free.

"I hope I can get you away," she then said, "and there is no time to be lost. Follow me!"

She flitted out of the cabin, and they followed. The deck had no other occupant. She sprang to the land, led the way up a bank, and paused in the shadow of some trees. Sol looked further and saw a light.

"That's a house, ain't it?"

"Yes, but, of all places, you must not go there. Do you know that your very lives are in danger?"

"We ought ter."

"Your enemies are there!"

"Eliza, you've taken a big risk for us, but we ain't ungrateful. We'll be yer friends, forever."

"I could not see you murdered."

"Did they really mean to?"

"They are talking it over, but I do not doubt what the result will be. But you must foil them; you must flee, at once. See! That is the direction for you ter take."

"But what o' yourself?"

"Never mind me."

"I do mind you! When they find us gone they'll know who did it, fur they're suspicious on ye already; an' they'll do ye mischief."

"They can do no more than kill me!" the girl replied, with the calmness of despair.

"But they ain't goin' ter do that!" Sol declared, sturdily. "We know you hev got a good heart, Eliza, an' we'll stick by them who sticks by us."

"I am Jimmy's wife."

"That don't alter it; go with us, and git among honest folks, who'll help ye. Come!"

"No! You go at once; I have other work to do."

"What?"

"In yonder house is a boy who is held a prisoner, and I fear for him. I am going to take him and flee. They will soon be on my track, but I hope to put him in the hands of some honest person—I pray that I may find an officer of law—before my enemies overtake me."

"Is the boy little Joe Fordrest?"

"Yes."

"Then count us in fur the move ter save him. Don't tell us ter go, fur we can't do it now. We'll all hang tergether, Eliza; and I'll bet we'll win the game!"

Eliza protested. She did not see how any one

could help her, and was unwilling that Sol and Ned should run any risks. She urged them to consider their own safety only, and get away as soon as possible.

This they refused to do, and she finally yielded. She said that, besides two women and Joseph, the occupants of the house were Jimmy, Cale Jones, Ross Brown and a gentlemanly-looking man to whom all looked for orders. Of course, this was Thomas Lake.

Having arrived at a decision, no time was lost. They moved toward the house by a circuitous route, taking great pains not to be seen. When opposite one of the windows Eliza paused.

"Let me see whether the men are all here," she directed. "Wait a moment!"

She went to the window. The lower sash was raised, and the curtain pulled all of the way down. She moved it sufficiently to get a view, and saw Flocton, Jones, Brown, and Lake seated at a table. They had just finished supper, and were drinking liquor in high spirits.

"Fill up well, lads," Lake was saying. "We have disagreeable work ahead of us to-night, and we can get fresh courage from every drink we take."

"We haven't settled how many we wipe out, yet," suggested Brown.

"Oh! the three boys will be enough; we don't want to disgrace ourselves."

"I say, add Eliza!" growled Flocton, with a scowl. "I tell you there is mischief in that woman. She never was a willing helper, and was given to whimpering over her work; and the seven devils are in her lately. I suspect her; I suspect that she's going to give me the dead shake. I tell you, our safety demands that we sacrifice Eliza. Living, she may betray us; dead, she will be harmless!"

A cold chill crept over Eliza, and her head grew dizzy. If she had been freezing in bitter weather, and numbed of body and brain, the effect could not have been greater.

"She's your wife, Jim," Lake replied, "and I suppose you have a right to say, but she ought to have a chance. Let this decide it!"

He took a coin from his pocket.

"Say when it's in the air!" he directed, and flung it up.

"Heads!" cried Jimmy.

The coin fell.

"Bully!" added the ruffian; "I've won. Now, keep you still, Lake, and let me have my way."

"I will!"

Eliza turned from the window, sick at heart. This cool, careless way of bartering her life away was a step in infamy which words could but poorly describe, but, severe as the blow was, it strengthened her resolution; she saw that she had moved none to soon.

"Follow me!" she directed, as she rejoined Sol and Ned, and they passed to the rear of the house.

"Now," Eliza added, "I will go and get the boy. Remain here, and be sure and do nothing to cause trouble."

She entered the house.

Sol and Ned were in a highly expectant state that was not free from nervousness. All depended upon Eliza, and they were useless for the time. Even if Joseph had been outside, they did not know in which direction to flee with him.

"Lucky we've got Eliza for a helper," Sol declared.

"I hope she won't be caught."

"Don't mention it! You make my hair rise up an' dance. Ef she does git kitched, our name is Dennis K. Mud!"

Several minutes passed, and the boys grew uneasy. Where was Eliza? Her prolonged absence was suspicious, and they feared she had met with trouble. Still they waited; still she remained absent.

When patience ceased to be a virtue, Sol again broke the silence:

"See here, Ned, we've got ter do somethin'!"

"What can we do?"

"I'll go inter the wigwam."

"Sol, you're mad; don't do it!"

"I must. We won't gain no credit in our consciences by neglectin' Eliza an' Joseph, an' I guess that luck will stan' by me while I creep up-stairs. I'll try it, anyhow. So-long!"

"Wait a little longer," urged Ned.

"An' let them snakes git in motion?"

"They may be in motion, now."

"Ned, it's no use; duty demands me ter make a break. I'm off!"

He opened the door and entered. Ned saw him go with gloomy emotion. He was eager to help Eliza and Joseph, himself, but, less reckless than Sol, he knew that great danger lay inside.

This time he waited alone. One minute—two

—three. Where was Sol? Suddenly he gave a great start.

A loud cry had sounded from the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

FRIENDS AND FOES MEET

THE cry was one of pain or alarm, or both, and it was that of a woman. Ned heard other sounds immediately after that; heavy footsteps and loud voices, and it became evident that the dreaded catastrophe had come.

Ned did not hesitate as to his part in the affair. Saltpeter Sol was there, and he would not desert his friend. He opened the door and entered the house.

There was a noise up-stairs as if two or more persons were struggling, and he went up two steps at a time. Reaching the top, he saw an open door, and, in the room beyond, Sol and Eliza were contesting with Cale Jones.

Ned sprang to the rescue and neatly tripped the ruffian, and the two fell upon the fellow so heavily that he was stunned. This was easily seen as they arose. Eliza darted into the next room, and came out with Joseph in her arms. The imperiled party turned to retreat, but as they did so, Lake, Flocton and Brown rushed into the room.

Jimmy broke into a loud laugh.

"Nabbed in the act, by Judas!" he cried.

He turned upon Eliza with a dangerous look.

"You traitress!" he hissed, "you have sealed your own fate! Upon them, Brown, and knock them over like ten-pins!"

"Down with them!" Lake added.

The men moved forward, and utter destruction seemed to confront Eliza and her young friends, but help, little expected, was at hand. A loud shout arose behind the would-be assailants:

"Halt! you scoundrels! Touch them at your peril!"

And Edmund Fordrest stood in the room with Hill and several other men at his back.

"Arrest these villains!" he added, pointing to Flocton and his gang.

The latter were taken wholly by surprise, and the nerve of one deserted him at this crisis; Lake did not make a movement, but stood like one stupefied. Flocton and Brown rushed forward to fight their way through, but the odds were against them; they were overpowered and bound.

Then Fordrest caught Joseph in his arms.

"Saved! saved!" he cried, joyfully.

Saltpeter Sol gravely shook Ned's hand.

"Messmate, I guess we're pooty near O. K., all hunk, right side up with care, an' *E pluribus*!" he asserted.

Fordrest turned to address the boys, but the sight of Eliza's wan face attracted his attention.

"My girl," he said, "I think I am right in believing you with us in this?"

"She's a baked brick, an' no discount," Sol asserted. "She saved Ned an' me, an' was tryin' ter do the same fur Joseph."

"I suspected as much. Young woman, you shall never regret having been on the side of justice. I will be your friend and protector, and aid you to lead an honest life."

"I don't deserve it," murmured Eliza. "I stole your grandson—"

"Were you not led on?"

"Yes, but that does not excuse me."

"I have been told that, since he was lost, you have been his protector. However much I regret the past, I am not so harsh as to be unable to forgive one who repents."

The girl bursted into tears.

"I deserve nothing," she reiterated.

"She was good to me, and I like her," deposed young Joseph.

"Enough!" cried Fordrest, happily. "After that testimony, there is but one thing to do. You are forgiven; you shall be saved."

Once more he turned, caught sight of Thomas Lake, started and exclaimed:

"Andrew Morse!"

Lake was speechless.

"So it is you!" uttered the previous speaker, in amazement. "Now, I know to whom all our troubles are due, and the cause thereof. Not content with robbing my poor son, and trying to put him in the hands of law, your malignancy has carried you further. Scoundrel! I see all, now!"

"He hired me to have the boy, Joseph, stolen!" interrupted Jimmy Flocton, eager, as cornered knaves usually are, to shift the burden of blame from his own shoulders.

"And you, villain that you were, had an unfortunate girl do your work! I want no confes-

sion from you, for you are to be prosecuted to the extent of the law. Sheriff, please take your prisoners below. We want to see what is there."

This direction was obeyed, and all were soon in the kitchen.

On arriving there Ned saw, with some surprise, an old valise upon a chair which had once been his father's, and which had been part of the Flying Fish's cargo. He was regarding it with an inquiry in his mind when Eliza came to his side.

"That has been the cause of all the attacks on you," she explained.

"But why? Of what value is it?"

"It contained papers very valuable to Lake, or Andrew Morse, or whatever his name is. They were there; he dared not go for them; he again hired Jimmy, but you had started on the raft before Jimmy reached your home. Determined to have them, he disguised himself as a tramp, one night, and attacked you on the raft. He failed."

"Then he got me to help him, thinking the presence of a woman would keep you from suspecting him. Our alleged upset in the boat was all planned, and, according to orders, I burned a newspaper as soon as it was sure you were to take us in, to notify Brown, who was watching on shore."

"A few words from me are necessary," put in Mr. Fordrest. "Lake, under the name of Andrew Morse, went into business with my son. The firm failed at the end of a year, owing many, and having defrauded many. It was barely proved that my son—since deceased—was innocent, but the blame was put where it belonged."

"Morse had disappeared, and has thus far escaped justice, but his day is over. He stole a great deal of money from the firm, but why he took my grandson is not clear to me."

"It was to get money from you, sir," Eliza explained, "but you searched so closely that he has never dared apply."

"Well, well, there is sunlight ahead, and I owe it all to you and these brave boys, Sol and Ned. Rest assured that I will not forget the debt!"

The mystery of the valise was solved. Under the lining Lake had put papers by which he hoped to get money in the future. When he left his home, after defrauding Ned, he took what he thought was the valise, but a resemblance deceived him, and he took the wrong one. Valuable the papers might have been, if he had had chance to use them, but Flocton and his allies had an exaggerated view of their value.

As it was, Lake never used them.

At his trial it was shown that he had long lived a double life, as well as an evil one, and he received a long term in prison. Some of his companions there are well known to the reader, for they include Brown, Jones, Mother Hooper and Flocton, all of whom went there to stay a long time, but death cut Jimmy's sentence short.

Tom Hill, having done so nobly, was put in the way of living an honest life, which he did, faithfully.

It was impossible to make Eliza take a place in the Fordrest family, but a good situation was obtained for her by the old gentleman, and he insists on looking to her welfare even now. She is honest, prosperous, and far from unhappy.

Mother Hooper's sister, the invalid, was also cared for satisfactorily.

The Fordrest family remains united and happy. Joseph is now almost a man in years, and so his grandfather is prouder of him, if possible, than of Caslina.

The family often go cruising in the resurrected Dancing Dervish, whereof Twombly is captain and Nixon mate, but the Flying Fish never made a second voyage. It was broken up at the point where Flocton landed it, and sold for what it would bring.

Sol and Ned stepped suddenly from poverty to what they considered affluence.

Fordrest took them in charge, and, as he had more money than he knew how to spend, he showered it upon them. Declaring that he saw in them the material for successful business men, he gave them an education in books and in business, and so conducted their lives that when they were old enough for real work, they were well fitted for it.

They are in business now, as partners, and in the midst of their prosperity they often speak of the days when they navigated the raft and contested with the kidnappers.

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